

Bloodbound

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Bloodbound

by [RaeDMagdon](#)

Summary

Lexa inherits a charm from her late grandmother. The last thing she expects is for a (naked) demon to pop out of it.

Notes

As promised, here's my collaboration with @alphacommander who came up with the original idea and drew some cute comics for it. I promise I will TRY MY ABSOLUTE BEST to get you frequent updates (bc the chapters are gonna be short but frequent), but Mass Effect Andromeda is coming out, so the next 4-5 days might be a clusterfuck. But I'm very inspired on this one!

I also swear that, even though this is an AU, I will do my absolute fucking utmost to keep Lexa and Clarke somewhat in character (aka no gentle flower child Lexa here).

Chapter 1

Lexa stared at the small brown envelope in her hand, blinking to try and clear the sting from her eyes. She had class in fifteen minutes. There wasn't time to cry, but she needed at least a few moments to collect herself before she headed out the door. She'd done a pretty good job of putting her grandmother's death from her mind the past week and a half, but now, with the letter in her hand, it was much more difficult to swallow her guilt.

She hadn't made it to the funeral. "We know you're far away," her mother had reassured her over the phone a few hours after it happened. "Nan wouldn't have expected you to skip school and fly all the way to the West Coast just to watch them put her in the ground."

Lexa had considered getting a ticket anyway. Her Master's program was strenuous, but she had fond memories of summer vacations spent at her grandmother's house with both her parents. Going back wouldn't have been the same, though. The house had been abandoned for the past year while Nan was in hospice care, and she had been the one to make it feel like a home away from home.

With a sigh, Lexa headed for one of the four cheap folding kitchen chairs she owned—the only one that didn't wobble. One of these days, she told herself, she was going to get a decent kitchen set. One of these days, after she finished her business degree... when she actually had more than a couple bucks in her savings account...

She set the envelope on the table and stared at it, unblinking. If she blinked, she was definitely going to cry, and she really didn't have enough time, especially if she had to clean the mascara off her cheeks to keep from looking like a raccoon.

For a moment, Lexa considered leaving the envelope on the table to deal with later. It would be waiting for her when she got home in about six hours. Then, she could go through whatever was inside privately, without putting on a face for her teachers and classmates.

But no. If she left it alone, she would spend the rest of the day wondering—dreading, really—what was inside. She certainly wouldn't retain anything during her lectures. She'd have to open it and do her best to keep her emotions in check, like always.

She picked up the envelope, only this time, it made a noise as something shifted around inside. Frowning, Lexa slid her finger through the seal and dumped the contents onto the table.

At first, all she saw was a piece of paper. She unfolded it to find a letter, not from her Nan, but from her mother.

Lexa,

Hope you're doing well. A few weeks before Nan passed, she asked me to send this to you.

I'm sorry to say I'd forgotten about it until today, when I was clearing out my purse and found it at the bottom.

I hope it will be a pleasant reminder of Nan for you. She was very insistent that you have it, since you liked it so much as a child.

Keep up the good work at school.

Love,

Mom

PS: Here's some grocery money

There was a fifty dollar bill enclosed with the letter, but Lexa ignored it. Instead, she dug back in the envelope. This time, she withdrew something that had gotten stuck in a curled-up corner near the bottom of the packet.

It was a golden bracelet with a little charm on one end, shaped almost like a steering wheel or a car tire. Several lines radiated out from the middle, crossing over a ridged outer circle. Lexa recognized the design immediately, although she hadn't seen it in years. On the frequent occasions she had played dress-up with Nan's jewelry box and pretended to be a queen—never a princess, of course—it had been her favorite royal accessory. Something about it had fascinated her.

"Someday, when you're older, you can have it," Nan had always promised.

"Well, I guess she meant it," Lexa said to the empty room. There was no reply, of course. She lived alone, and she liked it that way, even if the rent was a lot to handle on her own.

After a moment's hesitation, she undid the fastening and clipped the bracelet around her wrist. Strangely, it made her feel less like crying. The metal was almost warm against her skin. She rose with a sigh of relief, leaving the letter on the table and grabbing the fifty to tuck in her pocket. If she hurried, she could probably make it to class on time.

* * *

By the time Lexa returned to her apartment later that night, she was completely drained. Her classes had gone on forever, and even though she had taken thorough notes, she wasn't sure her brain had actually processed any of the material. Her mind had kept drifting back in time without her permission, and she'd found herself playing with her Nan's bracelet on more than one occasion.

The wheel-shaped charm tapped against her wrist as she flung her backpack into its usual corner beside the shoe rack, where she left it when she was too lazy to unpack all her textbooks. She probably wouldn't get much studying done tonight anyway.

Wearily, Lexa dragged herself toward the kitchen. She didn't have much of an appetite, but she needed to eat something.

After staring fruitlessly into the pantry and finding nothing but basic cooking ingredients and an open bag of Anya's favorite vinegar chips—the kind she absolutely hated—Lexa almost gave up. She considered ordering a pizza with the new fifty in her pocket, but she wasn't sure her stomach could handle the grease.

In a last ditch effort, she decided to dig through the fridge. Her efforts there weren't particularly fruitful either: milk, two lonely eggs, a sliver of butter in the butter dish, and some mostly-empty condiment bottles. The fruit drawer at the bottom, however, held an apple, the last of the fruit she had bought on her most recent shopping trip. Not exactly a meal, but at least her stomach wasn't objecting to it.

Lexa grabbed a cutting board from one of the bottom cabinets and a knife from the silverware drawer. Her Nan had actually had one of those push-down apple corers, back when she'd visited as a kid. She remembered, because they'd baked pies together...

"Ow!" She dropped the knife and pulled her other hand back, hissing in pain. Blood wept from a slice right in the middle of her palm, but the redness welled up so fast that she couldn't see how long the cut actually was. It had to be bad—not only did it sting, but she could feel a heavy throb as it pulsed out of her as well.

Immediately, Lexa turned on the kitchen sink with her good hand and shoved her injured one under it, washing away as much of the mess as she could. On closer inspection, the cut wasn't wide, just deep. Hopefully if she bandaged it, she wouldn't need to go to the ER for stitches she couldn't really afford—her mom's insurance didn't work well out of state.

She squirted a little soap over the injury, wincing when it stung and bubbled under the spray from the faucet. Trying to rub it in only hurt more, so she abandoned the effort and turned the water off, shaking the droplets from her hand and opening the medicine cabinet in search of some peroxide and a suitable bandage.

"Can I help you with that?"

The soft voice coming from somewhere near her shoulder made Lexa drop the bottle of peroxide onto her foot. She whirled around, hopping on one leg, raising the box of bandages she had managed to keep hold of in a pathetic attempt at self-defense. Suddenly, she wished she'd kept the knife instead.

When she saw who had actually spoken, her rapidly pounding heart didn't calm down in the slightest.

It was a woman. Sort of. At least, this person was definitely shaped like a woman, if her bare breasts were anything to go by. Her wavy blonde hair barely covered the pink tips of her nipples, and she wasn't wearing any clothes to speak of. A pair of pointy horns curled up from her head, and her smile revealed a set of sharpened incisors.

"W—wha..." Lexa stammered. It wasn't even a word, but it was all she could manage.

This woman was staring at her. This *naked* woman was staring at her. This naked woman, who wasn't even really a woman, because what woman on earth had horns, was staring at her with a bright, beaming smile.

"Your hand," the woman said, calm as you please. "Would you like some help?"

"I..." Lexa couldn't summon an answer. She had only just noticed that, in addition to being stark naked, this woman had a long red tail swishing behind her. It moved like a cat's, rhythmically from side to side.

The woman didn't seem to mind her stuttering. "I'm here to help you with whatever you need, you know." She bent down to pick up the bottle of peroxide, and Lexa jumped back as if flames had sprouted up from the floor beneath her feet.

She gripped the table with her good hand, certain she would fall over with the way her heart was racing. "Wh... wh... what are you doing in my apartment?" she managed to gasp at last.

"You called me here, silly," the woman laughed, and the sound made Lexa shudder. It was almost... cute.

No. Not cute. She's got horns and a tail. She just appeared out of nowhere! You should be terrified!

Instead, Lexa's breathing started to slow down. She was still in a state of shock—that had to be the only explanation—but it didn't seem like this strange girl or... whatever she was... wanted to hurt her.

"I... called you?" Lexa repeated. As her initial fear faded, she found herself faced with a new problem: what to do with her eyes. She couldn't help but stare at the strange invader as she straightened from her crouched position, but the fact that the woman was naked made the situation far more complicated. Her eyes flicked from the woman's face, down to her breasts, down to her hips and the small tuft of blonde curls between her legs before shooting straight back up to her face again.

Yes. Face. She would stick to the face.

"Mhmm," the woman said. She stepped forward, and Lexa would have stepped back in response if she hadn't already pressed herself into the edge of her table. "I'm Clarke, by the way. Nice to meet you, Mistress."

"Mistress?" Lexa repeated in disbelief. "I'm not... I mean... *what?*" She took a deep breath, closing her eyes. "Okay. Okay. When I open my eyes again, you'll be gone. You're not real. Maybe I'm on the floor. Maybe I'm dizzy from blood loss or something. Maybe I'm just really really tired and this is a stupid dream. Maybe—oh my God."

Soft fingers had closed around her injured hand, coaxing her to uncurl her fingers.

When she opened her eyes, the girl... thing... Clarke... was standing even closer than before. Lexa's jaw dropped, an action she sincerely regretted. With her mouth open, she could actually smell the woman hovering inches away from her—a scent that reminded her of flowers on a warm, sunny beach.

"I... think I need to change my medication."

"Well, you do need medical attention," Clarke said, and the soft, low timbre of her voice set Lexa's skin prickling. "Here. Let me help." She pulled Lexa's hand toward her, an action that left Lexa far too surprised to protest it. The cut was still bleeding, but she had completely forgotten. She watched, dazed, as Clarke put some peroxide on the wound and wrapped it up with the bandages that had fallen onto the table.

It was a quick process, but it seemed to Lexa to take forever. She knew, logically, that it should hurt, but her thoughts were far too scattered to process any sort of pain. She tried once to speak, but all that came out was a strangled sound that made no sense at all.

Great, Lexa. Just great.

"There," Clarke said after a few moments, giving her wrist a light squeeze. "You're all done. I don't think you'll need me to sew it up, but try to use your other hand."

For a moment, Lexa had no idea what to say, but at last, manners got the better of her. "Thank you?"

Clarke gave her a beaming smile. "You're welcome. So, can I do anything else for you, Mistress? Do you want me to clean the knife?"

"The knife..." In truth, Lexa had forgotten almost everything that had occurred before Clarke's bizarre appearance in her kitchen. She looked over at the counter, where the bloody knife was still sitting beside the sink. It was certainly a safer thing to look at than the naked woman in front of her. "Uh..."

"I'll take care of it."

Clarke turned around, heading toward the sink, and Lexa nearly breathed a sigh of relief—until she saw the round swell of Clarke's ass, her thin tail doing nothing to obscure the view. Lexa's mouth suddenly went dry. Perhaps asking Clarke to walk away hadn't been such a good idea.

Keep it together, she thought to herself, trying in vain to focus on the back of Clarke's head instead. *You have to figure out what's going on.*

“What are you doing here?” she asked at last. “Are you, uh... one of Anya’s friends? Did she give you a key and hire you or... are you like supposed to give me a lapdance or something? Because I don’t—”

Clarke turned around—and to Lexa’s dismay, her smile had become a smirk. “I can give you a lapdance, if that’s what you want, Mistress...”

“No! I mean... look, why are you in my apartment?”

To her utter relief, Clarke stopped before closing the gap between them again. “Because you summoned me here. Why else?”

“But—how?”

Clarke’s eyes dropped to her injured hand, and Lexa looked too, only to see her grandmother’s bracelet. The charm still had traces of blood on it, and it felt even warmer than usual. Gears started turning, and soon, the pieces clicked together.

“Oh. Oh no. You’re telling me you came from... this?” She brandished her forearm, causing the bracelet to shake.

“Well, not exactly *from* the bracelet,” Clarke said. “But it told me to come. You called me when your blood touched it.”

Lexa brought her good hand up to her forehead, covering her face. This was too much. Part of her still really wanted to believe that this was one of Anya’s practical jokes, but even her best friend wasn’t deranged enough to send a naked cosplayer into her apartment a week after her grandmother had died. She hadn’t heard the door open, and then... there were the horns. And the tail.

“I’m not sure I believe you,” Lexa said, still shielding her eyes with her hand.

Clarke merely laughed. “Oh, you humans. Acting like you’ve never seen a demon before.”

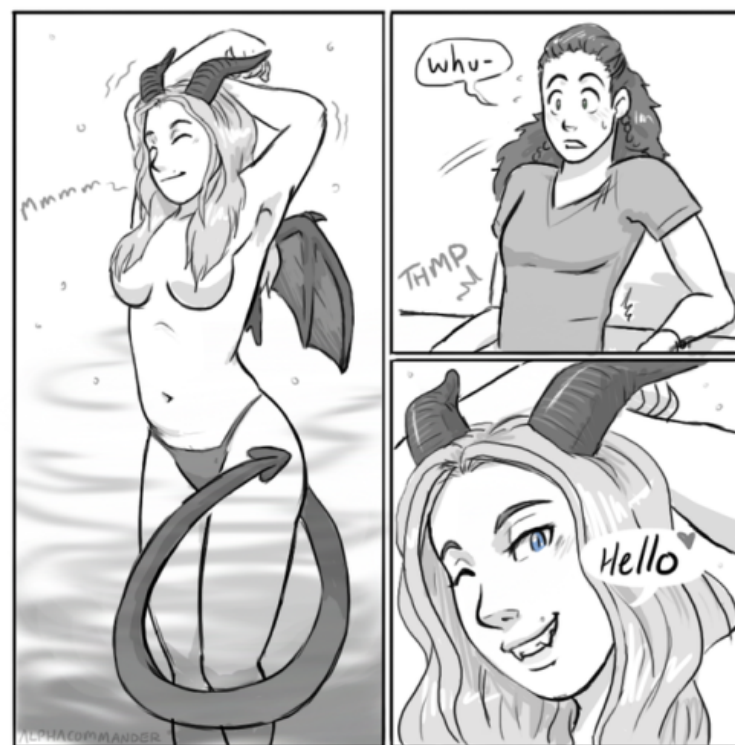
“I... I haven’t ever seen a demon before,” Lexa said.

“Fine. Look at me and I’ll prove it.”

Something in the way Clarke said ‘look at me’ caused Lexa to look from between her fingers. Clarke held up her hand, as if holding an invisible ball, and all of a sudden, fire flickered to life between her fingers. The flames danced in her cupped palm, and the distinct smell of sulfur wafted over, covering up the pleasant floral scent that had been there before.

Lexa gasped. “Holy shit. You... are holding fire.”

“What, like it’s hard?” Clarke clenched her fist, snuffing the flames out as if they had never been there. “So, what do you want me to do next, Mistress?” Her full lips peeled back over her teeth, showing the sharpened points. “I think the two of us are going to have a lot of fun together.”



Chapter 2

"You need to stop with this whole Mistress thing," Lexa said as firmly as she could. She straightened her shoulders, adopting a more confident posture. This Clarke person might or might not be an actual demon—an actual naked demon—but this was her apartment. Her rules. "I might believe you are what, or who, you say you are, but I'm definitely not your Mistress."

Clarke didn't object. She merely smiled, and something about the sharp-toothed smirk made Lexa's stomach flip.

"Whatever you say, Mistress."

"I told you to stop calling me that."

"Then what would you prefer I call you?"

It was an obvious question, but Lexa couldn't help feeling a bit surprised. She hadn't expected Clarke to give in so easily.

"Uh... just Lexa, I guess? That's my name."

"Lexa." The way Clarke's tongue touched the edges of her teeth on the 'L', as if tasting it, made Lexa forget how to breathe for a moment. "What a beautiful name."

Lexa's cheeks burned. "So, why do you think I'm your Mistress?" she asked, partially to distract herself from the embarrassing reaction. (It was still very difficult to keep her eyes on Clarke's face.)

"You offered me a blood sacrifice," Clarke said. "I can't ignore that." Her eyes, though pale blue, seemed to shine with a glittering light that wasn't quite human. If Lexa had doubted her claim to demonhood before, those doubts were slipping further and further away.

Lexa blinked rapidly. It almost felt as though Clarke were casting some sort of spell on her. "But I didn't," Lexa protested, gesturing at the sink with her good hand. "I just cut myself. It was an accident—"

"Accident or not, you gave me your blood. That means we're stuck together until you decide to release me."

The way Clarke said release set Lexa on edge. At first, she had wondered if Clarke's tone and body language weren't really all that seductive. Lexa had attributed it to her own filthy mind, as well as Clarke's nakedness. But now, there was no denying it. Clarke was hitting on her. A demon was hitting on her.

An awkward laugh of pure disbelief burst from her lips before she could stifle it, but she recovered quickly. "Okay then. I release you."

Clarke did nothing. She just continued to stare—a stare that scorched Lexa's skin until a rivulet of sweat started crawling down her spine. It took an effort of will not to stare back, but despite her best attempts, her gaze slipped down to Clarke's soft breasts. They were heavy, but firm, and the peaks of her pink nipples were almost impossible to look away from.

At last, Lexa wrenched her eyes away. "I... release you!" She waved her hand a little, as if that would help, but of course, it didn't.

Clarke chuckled, and the noise sent the heat coiling in Lexa's belly to lower, even more embarrassing places. "I'm afraid it doesn't work like that, Lexa."

Lexa instantly regretted asking Clarke to use her name. Somehow, it sounded even more sexual than 'Mistress'. "Why not?"

"Because you have to mean it. And right now, you don't."

Lexa's first instinct was to argue. She was, after all, studying to be a lawyer. "Yes, I do."

"No you don't."

With a frustrated sigh, Lexa looked away, aiming her eyes at the counter. At the very least, she wouldn't have to constantly fight the temptation to stare at Clarke's breasts. "Okay, fine. But what happens now? Where are you supposed to stay?"

"Here, I assume." Clarke's soft footsteps slapped lightly on the cheap kitchen tile, and Lexa turned to see where she was headed. She was wandering into the living room, and Lexa had no choice but to follow her. The only thing worse than having a demon in her apartment was leaving said demon unsupervised.

“Nice place,” Clarke said as she studied the television and the Star Wars posters above it. “Cozy. No roommates? Boyfriend? *Girl* friend?”

Lexa blinked in surprise. “Uh, no...”

Clarke smirked at her, showing the tips of her pointed incisors. “Ever get lonely?”

“Not really,” Lexa said. “I’m used to being on my own, with school and all, and... I don’t even know why I’m telling you this.”

“Because I should know a bit about you, if we’re going to be roomies.”

Lexa’s jaw drops. It takes her several moments to form words, and when she does, they’re an astonished stammer. “Wait, what?”

“I’m a demon, Lexa. I can’t exactly ask a landlord to rent to me. Besides, I need a food source, and I’m your responsibility.”

Food source? She hadn’t even thought about that. Of course Clarke would need to be fed...

Wait. I can’t think of her like some sort of pet. She’s a person. Demon. Whatever.

“So, what do you eat?” Lexa asked, fearing the answer.

Clarke’s glinting blue eyes narrowed, and Lexa felt them bore into her. “Emotions. *Your* emotions. Arousal is best, since I’m a succubus and all, so right now, I’m pretty full.”

Lexa had absolutely no idea how to respond to that. Saying anything would practically be an admission of guilt. It was true that her body was responding to Clarke—how could it not? The woman was naked and just a few steps away from her, and it had been forever since her breakup with Costia—but that didn’t mean she had to be a pig about it.

“So you’re just going to stay here and... eat?”

Clarke nodded. “You’ve got it, roomie. Don’t worry, I won’t be in your way. And if there’s *anything* you need...”

Lexa nearly choked on her own tongue. It was obvious what Clarke was implying, but there was no way she would accept an offer like that. No way in hell. (Okay. Maybe that wasn’t the best phrase to use in this situation.)

“Can I ask one more question?”

“Technically, that was a question, but shoot.”

“If you’re going to stay for a while, can you please wear some clothes?” Lexa asked, trying not to sound like she was pleading. “You can use some of mine if you want.”

Clarke’s lower lip stuck out in a slight pout. “Aww. Not a free spirit, huh? That’s okay. Becca asked me to wear clothes, too.”

That was another shock. It nearly sent Lexa reeling. “Wait. You... you *knew* my Nan? How?”

To Lexa’s surprise, Clarke looked a little disappointed. “Yeah, of course. She never mentioned me? She was my first Mistress. Oh, don’t look at me like that,” Clarke added when Lexa recoiled in horror. “I didn’t fuck your grandma. She only liked men, unfortunately. In fact, I was the one who set her up with your grandfather. That was a big enough service to earn my release. I hung around until her kids were born, then left them to play happy family. I mean, a demon for a godparent? A little weird, even for the sixties.”

Lexa practically fell onto the couch. All this new information was almost as overwhelming as having a real live demon in her apartment. “Is that why she gave me the bracelet?” Lexa asked, not so much to Clarke, but more to the universe—or maybe her grandmother. She stared at her wrist in confusion. “So I’d... inherit you? That’s kind of fucked up.”

“Why is it fucked up?” The couch dipped beside Lexa, and the smell of the beach wafted into her nose again. Clarke was sitting uncomfortably close, almost close enough for their knees to touch.

“Because you were... are... basically a slave. Am I interpreting that right?”

“More like an indentured servant,” Clarke said. “I got something out of the deal when I sold my soul and became a demon. It was worth it.”

“You mean you weren’t always a demon? You made some sort of bargain to become this way?”

“Yep. Don’t ask what it was, please.” For once, Clarke’s tone and body language weren’t seductive at all. She was entirely serious, and the change was drastic and startling. “I’ll have to tell you if you ask, and I want to keep it to myself.”

Lexa’s first instinct was to reassure her. “Don’t worry. I won’t stick my nose into your business.”

“Oh, you can have all the access to my business you want,” Clarke said. Like a lightswitch, the sexy attitude had flipped back on. “I really don’t mind. You’re hot, and if you’re anything like Becca, you’re nice too.” Clarke leaned in, close enough for Lexa to feel the heat of the demon’s breath near her neck. “I’d mess around with you even if you weren’t my Mistress and it didn’t get me a gourmet meal.”

“Nope,” Lexa said, edging away from Clarke on the couch. “Nope, definitely not. No messing around. You can stay, but we’re not... doing... that. Actually, let’s get you some clothes!”

Even though her legs were still a bit wobbly from shock, Lexa leapt off the couch and darted into the bedroom. Once inside, she closed the door behind her, sagging against it and exhaling heavily. Clarke had only been in her apartment a grand total of five minutes, and already, the demon had made her *very* uncomfortable. Worse still, except for the embarrassment, she didn’t mind the flirting. If Clarke had been a girl in class instead of a succubus, maybe...

“No,” Lexa said. “No way. Oh god, Nan, what did you get me into?”

The empty room, of course, gave no answers. She would have to figure this one out on her own—and resist Clarke’s advances, which she doubted would stop, until she found a way to release the demon from their blood bond.

With a sigh, she headed toward her closet. Hopefully, something in there would fit Clarke, even with those curves.

When Lexa returned to the living room, she saw that Clarke had moved back to the kitchen. Not only had she cleaned the knife on the counter, but she had started on the other dishes too. Her tail swished happily behind her as she scrubbed, almost like a cat’s when it was content.

Lexa cleared her throat.

Clarke turned, fingers dripping. “Just cleaning up a little. Didn’t want to leave blood lying around. Potent stuff, you know?”

“Here,” Lexa said, thrusting out her arms. “I don’t think my jeans will fit you, but I found some sweatpants and a shirt.”

“If you insist.” Clarke dried her hands on a dishtowel, then accepted the clothes. She stepped into the sweatpants, which fit, much to Lexa’s relief. Next came the shirt, which wasn’t quite as much of a success. Her breasts filled it out and lifted it high enough to show a strip of skin at Clarke’s midsection.

Lexa’s eyes were drawn to it automatically, but she tried to restrain herself. “Um, we can go out and buy you better stuff later. Or at least one pair of pants. I’m not exactly rich.” She remembered the fifty in her pocket from her mom. *Looks like it’ll be put to good use at the thrift store rather than at the pizza place down the road.*

“That’s sweet, Lexa. Thanks. Of course, we wouldn’t need to buy me clothes if you’d just let me be naked...”

Lexa shook her head. “Nope. Clothes when I’m around, please. And, uh, I guess you can have the bed? I’ll bunk on the couch.”

“Of course not,” Clarke said, folding her arms across her chest. “We’ll share the bed. I promise not to bite unless you ask.”

Lexa chewed on her lower lip. Clarke might be staying for more than one night, at least until she could figure out a way to break their bond. Sleeping on the couch for longer than that would be hell on her back. “Only if you stay on your side and wear pajamas.”

“Deal,” Clarke said. She extended her hand, and Lexa took it automatically.

Clarke didn’t shake, though. She just held Lexa’s fingers, letting the warmth of her palm bleed into Lexa’s. “I’m glad you’re the one who called me,” she said. “Knowing you’re Becca’s granddaughter... it brings up some good memories. It’s nice to know she had a happy life after I was gone. She did, right? Have a happy life?”

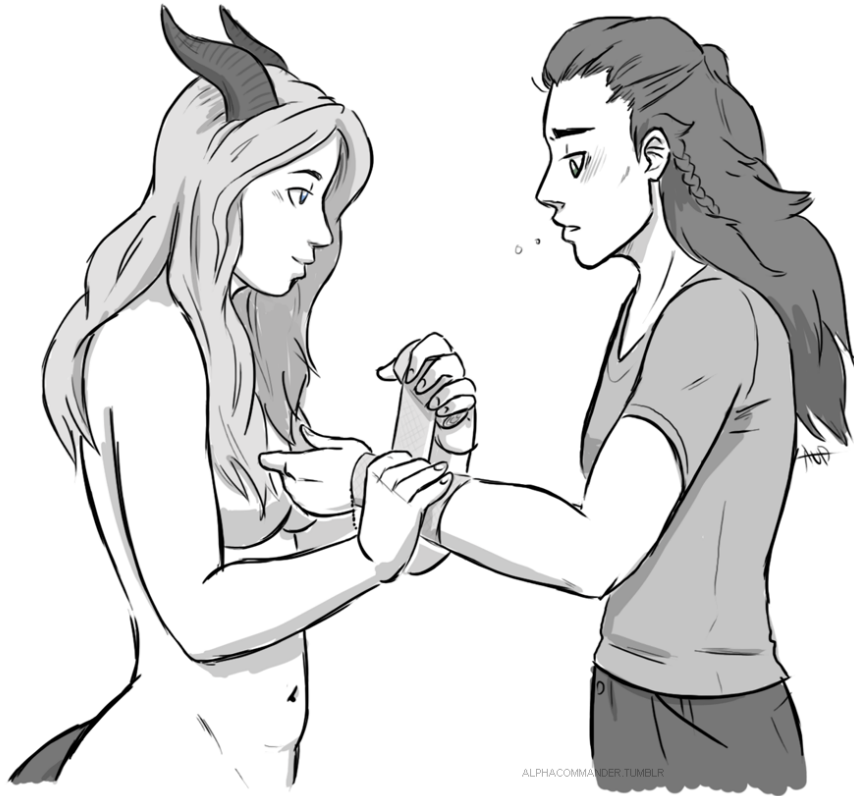
“Yeah,” Lexa whispered. “I’m pretty sure she did.”

“Good. Now... you look like you’re starving. How about some food? I make a mean ravioli.”

“Not sure I have the ingredients. I haven’t been to the grocery store in a while. But you can dig around in my pantry if you want. I’ll help?”

Clarke smiled. “Now you’re talking. Let’s see what we can whip up together.”

And now it's time for fabulous drawings by @alpha-commander!!! You should all follow her on tumblr. ;w; I cry when I see the cuteness she produces! And she inspired this whole fic.





Aaaaand a new drawing for Chapter 1!!!



Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

as always, please follow me on tumblr @raedmagdon and my artist friend @alphacommander

Warmth.

Warmth was the first thing Lexa felt as she drifted from the soft embrace of sleep. Something very warm and soft was pressed against her stomach, and something ticklish was brushing the tip of her nose. She blinked open her eyes only to see a waterfall of glittering gold. Sunlight streamed in through the bedroom window, highlighting Clarke's wavy hair.

That was when Lexa realized exactly who was in her arms and the awkward position they were both in. Although she and Clarke had gone to sleep on opposite sides of the bed, as far apart as possible, one of her arms had found her way around the demon's waist during the night. Worse still, one of her hands was cupping Clarke's heavy breast, and the swell of Clarke's ass was tucked securely against her pelvis.

Lexa's face burned. Her pulse spiked, and she began to panic, but she managed to keep still through sheer force of will. If she moved, she risked waking the sleeping woman in her arms, and *that* would mean even more awkwardness.

She took several deep breaths, counting them out. One, two, three...

Slowly, she removed her hand from Clarke's breast. Although Clarke was still wearing the t-shirt Lexa had lent her, it didn't offer much protection. Even after she pulled away, Lexa could feel the stiff point of Clarke's nipple where it had pressed into the middle of her palm.

Next, Lexa set about unwinding her arm from around Clarke's waist. She moved slowly, shifting over to her side of the bed as carefully as possible so as not to make the mattress dip.

Her efforts were in vain. As soon as she untangled herself from the awkward position, Clarke let out a loud squeak of a yawn and rolled onto her back, stretching her arms high above her head.

The movement revealed the slight curve of her pale stomach, and Lexa's own stomach erupted with butterflies.

Clarke's blue eyes opened, and Lexa's heart flew up into her throat.

"Uh, good morning," she said, trying to swallow it down without choking.

"Good morning, Mistress—I mean, Lexa."

Clarke lowered her arms, propping herself up on one elbow. A warm sleep-smell clung to her, even sweeter than her usual scent. Something twitched beneath the covers, and Lexa nearly jumped as it brushed against her knee. Oh. Clarke's tail. She hadn't even noticed, thanks to their awkward position, but feeling it brush against her skin made her shiver—and not in an entirely unpleasant way.

"So. You're still here."

"Yeah," Clarke said. "Still here. Were you expecting otherwise?"

"I thought you might have been a dream," Lexa admitted.

Clarke chuckled. "Do you usually turn down beautiful naked women in your dreams? That's kind of sad."

Lexa decided this would be a perfect time to leave the bed. She tossed off the covers and rolled onto her feet, hurrying over to the closet. "Do you want breakfast?" she asked as she dug out some fresh clothes, relieved to have something to do that gave her an excuse *not* to look at Clarke's beautiful face. "I could make something—"

"No need," Clarke said. Even without turning around, Lexa could picture her smirk. "I've already eaten."

Lexa's breath hitched. She remembered what Clarke had said the day before, about feeding from emotions. Did that mean Clarke had sensed her arousal? She hoped not, but feared the worst. Her logical brain took over, and she decided the best course of action was to ignore the possibility. Even if Clarke had felt her feelings, that didn't mean she had to acknowledge them. It wouldn't be right.

"I'm going to shower," she said, tucking a fresh pair of pants beneath her arm and heading over to the dresser for some underwear and a tank top. "No class today, so... I guess we're stuck together. Unless I can release you."

"Nope," Clarke said, still smiling. "You won't get rid of me that easily. I have to perform some big service for you first, and so far, all I've done is wash some of your dishes and steal your clothes."

"It was worth a try," Lexa said. Her law-student mind kicked into action, and she added, "I don't suppose you demons have some kind of written contract I could look at? There's got to be a loophole somewhere."

"No written contract. Verbal agreement made with my blood, I'm afraid... and I'd rather not share the details unless you order me, because it involves telling you how I became a demon in the first place."

"Fine," Lexa said. "I'll just think of some service you can do for me. But first, I stink."

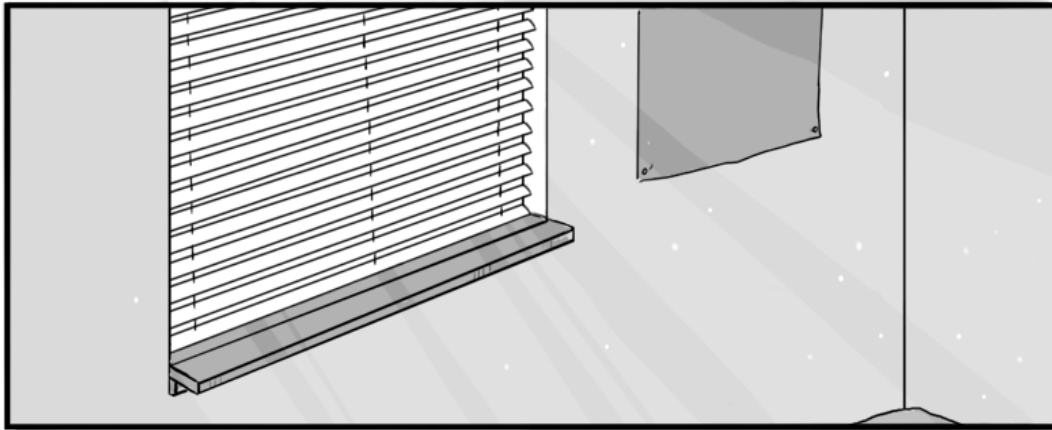
"You don't," Clarke called after her, but Lexa was already out of the room, hurrying toward the bathroom and a little privacy. Once she was alone, she groaned and stared at her reflection in the mirror. Her cheeks were bright pink. So much for hiding her reactions. She would need to do better if Clarke was going to stay awhile.

As she stepped into the shower, she tried to brainstorm possible tasks Clarke could perform for her in order to earn her freedom, but her mind kept wandering to much less useful, and much more embarrassing places. Clarke had smelled so good, and her skin had been so soft... In the haze of sleep, Lexa had almost been tempted to kiss her shoulder before she'd realized what was going on.

"No kissing," she announced aloud, her voice echoing softly in the confines of the shower. Still, she shuddered as the steam caressed her skin. There would be no kissing, no fantasizing, and most definitely no flirting back when Clarke initiated. She needed to maintain control—a task that was proving surprisingly difficult. She'd only known Clarke for all of two days, but the demon affected her in ways that even her ex-girlfriends hadn't.

It must be part of Clarke's demonic powers. That was the only explanation. Lexa clung fervently to that hope as she finished washing and threw a towel around herself, but deep down, part of her knew that wasn't true. She wasn't sure how—it was just an instinct she had. And her instincts were rarely wrong.

She stared forlornly at her toothbrush before removing it from its holder. She'd have to get used to this arrangement, and her awkward feelings about Clarke, because it didn't seem like the demon planned on leaving any time soon.



ALPHACOMMANDER.TUMBLR



* * *

Three days.

It had been three days since Clarke had appeared in her apartment, and they had been, without a doubt, the weirdest three days of Lexa's entire life.

First of all, there were the home-cooked meals. Whenever Lexa got back from class and dropped her bookbag by the door, there was always a whiff of something delicious wafting over from the kitchen. Her stomach had never been so full, and her garbage can had never been so free of pizza boxes and Chinese food containers.

Second, there was the "nest" Clarke had made by the couch. Although they had taken to sharing the bed—an arrangement that was growing more and more awkward every morning, since Lexa usually woke up tangled with Clarke in some awful, wonderful way—Clarke spent most of her time in the living room, parked in front of the television. Although she kept the rest of the house spotless, doing domestic chores Lexa didn't even ask or want her to perform, that little island seemed to accumulate all kinds of junk. Clarke was apparently a messy person when not serving someone else.

Currently, the demon's den had three separate blankets, two pillows without cases, one case without a pillow, three bags of chips without clips on them, an old styrofoam cup that had once held a milkshake, empty DVD cases, a PS4 controller, crumpled piles of clothes, Lexa's makeup bag, and a large pair of ugly toenail clippers Lexa had thought she'd lost years ago. There was also a nail file, which Clarke had claimed as her own—Lexa had caught her filing the tips of her horns one day in the bathroom.

But the junk pile wasn't even close to the largest adjustment Lexa had made. Even though she had purchased Clarke some clothes at the thrift shop, in addition to lending Clarke several of her own outfits, the demon still strutted around naked more often than not. Clarke, it seemed, considered clothes a prison, and only wore them when Lexa insisted. Lexa always did insist, but five minutes later, she'd find one of Clarke's shirts draped on the back of a chair somewhere.

"Is it the temperature?" Lexa asked one evening in desperation, when she looked up from one of her lawbooks to see Clarke stripping out of her sports bra (again). "Because I can turn the heat down..."

Clarke rolled her eyes, flashing a sharp-toothed smile. "I'm a demon, Lexa. Compared to where I've been, this is frigid."

Lexa chewed uncomfortably at her lower lip. She had very deliberately tried not to think about what Clarke's existence meant in terms of heaven, hell, and the various human religions and mythologies. But still, she couldn't help asking, "Uh... do you mean you actually came from...?"

Clarke seemed to get what she was trying to say. "Oh, there are lots of planes of existence," she said as she wiggled out of her pants. "I guess you could say the one I'm from is sort of Hell-like. It's got brimstone, anyway."

It took a herculean effort for Lexa to tear her eyes away from Clarke's breasts and how they swayed with each movement. "Brimstone, huh?"

"Relax," Clarke said, seeming to notice her stilted reactions. "I'm just putting on something else. These clothes are so itchy, I don't know how you stand it."

Lexa sighed with relief. "It's not that bad. Didn't you used to wear clothes before you were a demon?"

"Reluctantly," Clarke said. Her flat tone of voice didn't invite further questions. "Anyway, I'm enjoying all the candles you have around here. They're a nice change."

Lexa had noticed. Clarke always seemed to keep one burning in the living room and another in the bedroom, sometimes without really thinking about which two scents would go best together. Then again, she knew she was a bit of a snob. It was a well-known fact—which was why candles were the go-to present all her friends and family bought her every birthday and Christmas.

"You can look now," Clarke said, and Lexa raised her eyes from between the safe pages of her book once more. As promised, Clarke was wearing something else, although it wasn't much better than naked. She hadn't put on a new bra underneath her clinging tank top and the pair of tight boxers she wore left most of her legs bare.

Lexa shook herself. She had to try and stick to her 'no staring' rule, no matter how many times she caught herself breaking it. "So, have you had any thoughts about this 'great service' you're supposed to do for me?" she asked, desperate to change the subject. "Because I've been thinking..."

"Uh-oh," Clarke muttered. "That's not good." She flopped back into her nest, kicking her feet up on top of a textbook Lexa vaguely remembered using two semesters ago. She had no idea where Clarke had gotten hold of it or why she'd claimed it for her own.

"What do you mean, that's not good? Don't you want to be free?"

Clarke merely shrugged. "Lexa, from the past few days we've spent as... let's say roommates... I can tell you're possessed of a mind. Unfortunately, demon bargains don't work on logic. They're tricky. You can't just plan how they're going to play out. The harder you try, the more screwed-up everything will get. Understand?"

Lexa most certainly did not understand, but she also knew that arguing with Clarke was pointless. She was blunt and honest, but also sly, in that she never revealed quite enough information to satisfy Lexa's curiosity. Worse still, she had a way of answering questions that only raised more questions.

"So, what do you suggest? If you don't like my plan, tell me a better one."

"I don't have a plan," Clarke said, "but I can give you some advice. If you want me gone—and you don't have to be quite so insistent about it, because I do have feelings, you know—you need to integrate me into your life. The more I get to know you,

the quicker I figure you out, and the quicker I'll spot an opportunity to turn your life around."

Lexa couldn't help feeling defensive. "I like my life just fine the way it is," she said, closing her textbook. It wasn't like she was getting much studying done anyway. "I'm going to a good school—"

"There's more to life than school."

"I've got a decent place—"

Clarke looked around the apartment, snorting skeptically.

"Hey, don't judge. You're living here too."

"I know," Clarke drawled.

"And I've got family, friends..."

"Then why haven't I seen any of them?"

Lexa stared at Clarke in disbelief. "What? You just expect me to bring you home during winter break and say, 'Hey, Mom! Meet Clarke, the demon from Nan's bracelet!' I don't need my meds adjusted again."

The awkward beat of silence was interrupted by a loud buzzing noise. Lexa immediately recognized it as her phone, but to her dismay, it was coming from beneath one of the blankets inside Clarke's nest. The demon burrowed into the pile, following the sound until she held up Lexa's phone triumphantly.

"Thanks," Lexa said, getting up and extending her hand for the phone even as Clarke studied the screen. "I don't know how it got in with your stuff."

Clarke didn't pass it over. "Anya..." she said, grinning at the phone. "Who are you, I wonder? A friend?"

"*Just* a friend," Lexa insisted. Even though they were only a couple of years apart, she had never once thought about dating Anya. In fact, Anya was the reason she had come to the West Coast in the first place, and part of the reason she had gone to law school. She was a mentor, an inspiration.

She was also someone Lexa definitely didn't want Clarke meeting, at least not yet.

"Oh good. Nice to see you actually have at least one of those. Aaaand..."

Clarke started texting, forcing Lexa to make a grab for her phone. "Hey, what are you doing?"

"She asked if she could swing by to pick up her movie," Clarke said. "I just told her yes."

By the time she stopped leaning away and passed the phone back, it was too late. Lexa stared down at the text history in dismay, including Clarke's last message: 'Sure, come over now'.

"Clarke!" she groaned, slumping down into the demon's nest and burying her face in her free hand. "That was a shitty thing to do."

"Shitty? Why?" Clarke shifted closer, and once more, Lexa caught a whiff of the beach. "She's your friend. I'm your demon. Why shouldn't we meet? Unless you're *ashamed* of me..."

"Confused by you," Lexa grumbled. "Look, I get that you've had a few decades to get used to the whole 'demons exist' and 'blood pact' thing, but I'm *not* used to it! And I can guarantee Anya isn't either. How am I supposed to explain this to her? How do I explain... you? She's going to think I'm crazy."

"I can make that a bit easier for you," Clarke snapped her fingers, and to Lexa's shock, the curling horns on top of her head vanished in the blink of an eye. When she smiled, her teeth were flat, human-looking. "Let's say some of the demon stuff is a cosmetic choice."

Lexa's jaw dropped. She couldn't form a response. After a few moments, and to her deeply unsettling surprise, she found herself missing the way Clarke had looked before. Sometime over the past few days, she'd gotten used to the horns, the fangs, and the tail.

"I... thanks, Clarke." She folded her hands in her lap, unsure what else to say.

“No problem.”

Lexa suddenly realized that Clarke was sitting extremely close to her—close enough to share body heat. Their thighs were almost touching. Even so, she didn’t edge away. She got the sense that she had hurt Clarke’s feelings by ‘hiding’ her, for lack of a better word, and she didn’t want to make it worse.

“I’m sorry if anything I said was offensive. I’m not embarrassed by you. I’m just... confused. Most days I still wake up thinking you were some kind of dream, or that I’m going crazy.”

Clarke offered her a small smile, more genuine than most of her flirtatious smirks. “No crazier than I suspect you usually are.”

“You can tell all that from just three days in my house?”

“Yeah.”

The buzzer rang. Anya, probably. “I should get that,” Lexa said, but she made no move to get up.

“Lexa?” Clarke reached out, brushing the top of her hand, which was sitting on one of the empty videogame cases. “I’m sorry, too. Sometimes I do impulsive things. I shouldn’t have messed with your phone.”

Lexa was so shocked by the warmth of Clarke’s hand on top of hers that she forgot how to speak. When she finally managed to swallow down the pounding lump in her throat, she still had to clear it several times. “I... thanks. For apologizing. It’s okay.”

“So, the door?”

“Right.”

Lexa picked her way out of Clarke’s nest, trying not to trip over a stray charger. She still had no idea how she was going to explain Clarke to Anya, but she didn’t have much time to think about it. She would just have to wing it—something she *hated* doing.

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

I am so, so sorry for the delay. I was banned from AO3 for a month, so I couldn't post anything. :(But I'm back now, so this story should update rapidly!

As always, follow me on tumblr @raedmagdon and my artist friend @alphacommander

‘Winging it’ didn’t start out as well as Lexa had hoped. Apparently, her whispered conversation with Clarke had taken too long for Anya’s liking, because before she could clamber out of the demon’s makeshift den, she heard the rattle of keys in the lock.

“Hey, Lexa,” Anya said from out in the hallway. “Are you home? I’m using the spares!”

Lexa kicked aside the charger that had been tripping her up, only to get her foot caught in a tangled blanket. While she growled in frustration, Clarke rose gracefully out of the pit, picking her way expertly over the mess and meeting Lexa at the edge of the couch. “I’ll get it,” she offered.

“No!” In desperation, Lexa pinned Clarke between her hands, trapping her against the arm of the couch. “I mean, Anya doesn’t know you yet, and…”

Her voice trailed off. Suddenly, it occurred to her that she and Clarke were only a few inches apart. Clarke’s hips were practically pressed into hers. Clarke’s nose was right near her nose. And Clarke’s lips…

Lexa licked her own lips instinctively. She couldn’t for the life of her remember what she had been saying or doing moments before.

The sound of the door opening reminded her. “Hello,” Anya said, in a voice that didn’t even try to hide her surprise. “Am I… interrupting?”

Lexa whipped around. Anya was standing in the doorway, seemingly unsure whether she should commit to entering the apartment or not. She didn’t look embarrassed, not exactly, but her eyebrows were definitely approaching her hairline.

Heat flashed across Lexa’s face. She knew how she and Clarke must look, but it still took her several seconds to tear herself away. “No!”

Clarke didn’t help sell the lie at all. She continued leaning against the couch with a sly smirk on her face, looking perfectly at home. “Hey,” she said, giving Anya a half-wave.

“You’re not interrupting,” Lexa insisted, but all her mock trial practice had deserted her. She didn’t sound the slightest bit convincing, even to herself.

“Is that so?” Anya’s eyes zipped over to Clarke, then back to Lexa again. “Who’s your friend?”

Lexa swallowed. Clarke wasn’t exactly her friend, but she couldn’t tell Anya the truth. She cleared her throat, taking a step away from Clarke and gesturing toward her in a motion she hoped wasn’t too awkward. “Anya, this is Clarke. She’s my roommate…”

“Girlfriend,” Clarke said at the exact same time, grabbing one of Lexa’s hands.

All the blood that had rushed to Lexa’s face suddenly drained out of it. Girlfriend? This was exactly the implication she had wanted to avoid. It was hard enough avoiding her attraction to Clarke already. If Anya, her best friend, thought they were dating… she didn’t even want to consider the possibilities.

Apparently, Anya was already considering the possibilities. Her lips pressed into a thin line and her eyes narrowed. “Your roommate girlfriend, huh? Interesting.”

Lexa kept hold of Clarke’s warm hand even though it burned in hers, forcing an awkward grin that she hoped wasn’t all teeth. If she contradicted Clarke, it would only make both of them look more suspicious.

“Could you excuse us for a moment?” Anya said to Clarke. She reached for Lexa’s free elbow, pulling her away with gentle purpose. To Lexa’s relief, Clarke didn’t follow them. She went to sit on the couch, although Lexa couldn’t resist stealing a quick peek at her ass before she plopped down.

“Lexa, what the fuck,” Anya whispered once they were out of earshot.

Lexa cringed. Not many people could make her feel this embarrassed, but Anya was definitely one of them. Anya had been a sort of mentor for her since childhood, in addition to being one of her only friends. The last thing Lexa wanted to do was disappoint her. “I can explain,” she insisted, but the statement came out more of a question. “Sort of? Not really.”

More like I don’t want to explain. If you knew the truth, you’d think I was crazy.

“Is this for real?” Anya said, tilting her head subtly toward Clarke. “You haven’t introduced me to her before. You didn’t even move this fast with Costia.”

At the mention of her ex-girlfriend, Lexa became a bit more defensive. “This is nothing like that.” Anya had warned her the relationship wouldn’t work out, but she had plowed ahead anyway—only to realize that breezy, take-life-one-day-at-a-time Costia hadn’t been able to commit to someone as serious, studious, and pressed for time as Lexa nearly always was thanks to school.

“Mhmm.” Anya didn’t look convinced. She glanced at Clarke again and the demon gave them another little wave, almost seeming amused. “And now she lives with you. U-haul, really? This isn’t like you, Lexa.”

Lexa sighed heavily. She had a decision to make. She could contradict Anya’s assumptions and explain that Clarke wasn’t her girlfriend, but honestly, then the two of them living together without dating would seem even weirder. It wasn’t exactly a secret that Lexa disliked sharing her personal space, even with people she happened to be friendly with. Anya might grow even more suspicious, and the last thing Lexa wanted was for her friend to discover that she now “owned” a demon that had once belonged to her Nan.

Or...

Or, she could play along with what Clarke had said. Anya might take a while to warm up to it, but she was pretty sure faking a spur-of-the-moment relationship and a convincing breakup later would be easier than explaining the truth. Anya knew her mother, after all. If her mom found out... well, it wouldn’t be good. She didn’t need her friends and family thinking she was crazy and trying to pull her out of school to check her into a mental institution. It would be like her teenage years all over again. School and her life here were too important to disrupt. She’d worked damn hard to put them in order.

“I know,” Lexa said when she realized Anya was still waiting for some kind of response. “I’m sorry. I’ve just been busy...” Too late, she realized what she was implying. Anya sighed, and Lexa’s awkward smile became more stretched.

“You’d better explain this later.” She shoved a blu-ray case into Lexa’s hand, a remastered version of *Damn Yankees*. It just so happened that Anya shared her taste for embarrassing musicals. (And, of course, the musical she’d borrowed just happened to feature a demon). “I only came by to drop off your movie anyway.”

“Uh... thanks.”

Anya pulled away from her, heading for the door. “I’m sorry I can’t stay to chat,” she said to Lexa, before glancing over at Clarke one last time. “It was nice to meet you, Clarke. I’m sure we’ll see each other again.”

“You too,” Clarke said with a brilliant smile.

Lexa didn’t relax until Anya left the apartment, locking it behind her with the spare set of keys.

“So, *Lovergirl*...” Lexa’s eyes slid over to Clarke. The demon was still sitting on the couch, both arms sprawled across the back. Her horns and tail had reappeared, and said tail was currently twitching slowly near one of her shoulders. “Your friend seemed nice.”

“Why’d you call me your girlfriend?” Lexa demanded, folding her arms across her chest.

Clarke wasn’t intimidated. She merely smirked. “I did that for you. Not to burst your bubble, but you’re not as good at lying as you think you are. Friends don’t stare at each other the way you stare at me.” Lexa’s mouth fell open, but Clarke didn’t give her a chance to deny it. “Save your breath. I know you’re attracted to me. Succubus, remember?”

“This doesn’t change anything,” Lexa muttered, although she was finding it difficult to be angry. “It doesn’t matter how pretty I think you are. As long as you think I’m your ‘owner’, nothing can happen. It’s gross and non-consensual.”

Clarke wasn't at all put off by that statement. In fact, her eyes twinkled. "You mean if I wasn't your demon, you *would* go ahead and fuck me?"

Lexa raised her eyes to the ceiling—although what kind of help she was seeking, she couldn't be sure. Patience, perhaps.

"I'm glad you think I'm pretty," Clarke added, causing Lexa's face to burn.

"Well..."

Clarke held up her hand. "Stop while you're ahead. So, are you going to tell me why you were so desperate to convince your friend Anya that everything is normal? Your smile looked like it was about to crack."

For once, Lexa was relieved at the change of subject. "I didn't cope so well in my teenage years, that's all. Anya knows my family. If she tells my mom and brother I'm 'living with a demon', they'll be on the next plane out here."

"Mom and brother..." Once more, Clarke's flirtatious tone dropped, revealing something deeper. "No dad in the picture?"

"No..." Lexa uncrossed her arms, studying Clarke closely. "Why?"

"No reason." But even though Clarke's words sounded entirely truthful, Lexa suspected from the increasing twitch of her tail that she was, in fact, lying.

She decided to drop it. If there was one thing she'd learned, it was that Clarke hated answering personal questions, especially about the time before Nan.

"So, what are we going to do about this girlfriend thing? I see Anya a lot."

Clarke's tongue peeked out to run over her lips. Lexa gulped. The slight fork in the middle sent her mind to places she wasn't comfortable with. "You're saying we'll have to sell it, huh?"

"Don't get any ideas," Lexa said. "This is only until I figure out how to free you. And it doesn't mean you get to make out with me in public."

Clarke seemed almost offended. "What do you think I am? I'm a demon, not a drunken fratboy. I *ask* before I touch a lady's tits."

Of course, with that comment, it took all of Lexa's willpower *not* to imagine Clarke touching her tits. Through her shirt, under her shirt, without her shirt at all...

"By the way, we need to clean up this mess," she said, gesturing at Clarke's hoard of junk. "I bet Anya will stop by tomorrow to check and make sure I'm *not* as insane as I acted today, and I don't want her seeing more of this."

"What's wrong with this?" Clarke asked, pouting as she examined her precious pile. "It's useful stuff."

Lexa walked over, nudging the empty styrofoam milkshake cup with her toe. "How, exactly, is this useful?"

Clarke huffed, but rose from the couch. "Fine. Since you're ordering me to."

"I'm not ordering. I'm asking politely. I'll help."

"As if cleaning your toilets isn't enough," Clarke mumbled, gathering up some of the most offensive trash and carrying it over to the bin.

"Wait, you cleaned my toilet? Clarke..."

"Hey, it needed it. You should pick up more bleach, by the way. Your shower could do with a scrub too."

Lexa blushed. The shower was her own personal oasis—the only one left, since Clarke had taken over her apartment—and something about Clarke cleaning it rubbed her very wrong. "Let me do that, please. It's my apartment."

"Fine. Clean, don't clean... make up your mind." Clarke returned to the pile of junk and started rolling up stray power cords.

Lexa didn't point out that she hadn't asked Clarke to clean in the first place. Meanwhile, she scooped up some items that actually belonged in the bathroom, including the large nail file, and carried them back to their proper place.

It wasn't until she was actually in the bathroom, putting things away in drawers and staring at her shower, that she realized why she was so embarrassed. The shower was the only place she allowed herself to think about Clarke *that* way for more than a split second. She hadn't actually done anything about it, but she was only human, despite what some of her classmates thought.

With the warm water rolling over her skin and Clarke safely in another room, Lexa didn't have to worry about her gaze wandering to inappropriate places. She didn't have to worry about ethics. She could just close her eyes, breathe in the steam, and think about Clarke. Her full breasts, her softly rounded thighs, the curve of her hips...

Lexa blinked. Her mouth had gone dry, but other parts of her most definitely weren't. Worse still, her reflection was flushed. She turned on the sink faucet, splashing a handful of cold water onto her face. She needed to get a grip on herself before she embarrassed herself more than she already had in front of Anya.

And when Clarke starts pretending we're girlfriends, it's only going to get worse.

Later that evening, Lexa sat on the couch in the freshly-straightened living room, her laptop open and Clarke curled up beside her. The demon's head was resting perilously close to her thigh, and she seemed to be dozing thanks to the low noise of the television in the background.

Normally, Lexa didn't have trouble concentrating on her schoolwork, but these were not normal circumstances.

She stopped in the middle of typing a sentence and glanced down at Clarke's sleeping face. Clarke looked so young with her eyes closed and her features relaxed. It was hard to believe that she was really old enough to have seen the sixties, let alone a time before that.

What made you decide to become a demon, anyway? Lexa couldn't help wondering as she listened to Clarke's light snores. She could think of several possibilities—longer life, certain magical powers—but none of them seemed to fit with what she knew of Clarke's personality.

Clarke moaned in her sleep and snuggled closer, shifting her head further into Lexa's lap. Lexa froze for a moment, then moved her laptop a few inches to the side. She couldn't afford to get it repaired if Clarke's horns did any damage.

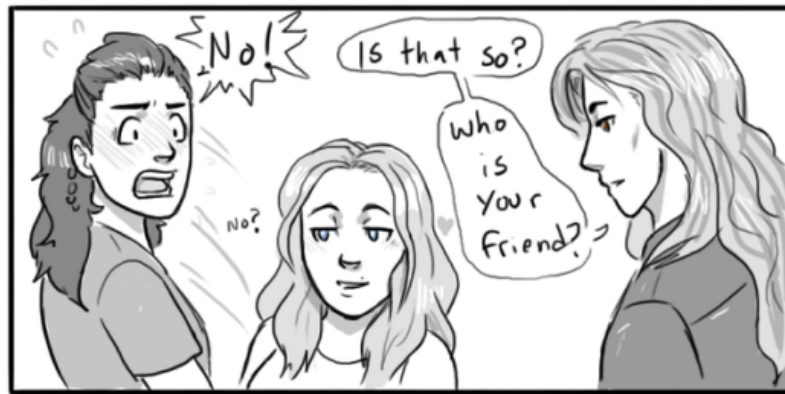
It was then that she noticed a stray lock of golden hair falling across Clarke's cheek. It was in danger of brushing her nose, and without thinking, Lexa swept it back behind her ear. Clarke's lashes fluttered a bit, but she didn't wake up. In fact, she seemed at peace.

Lexa sighed. "I'm not going to get any work done with you around, am I?" she murmured, even though she knew Clarke couldn't hear her. But for some reason, she didn't mind.

As strange as it was, she was beginning to enjoy Clarke's company. Nothing sexual or romantic could happen between them, of course, but perhaps... perhaps they could become friends, like Clarke and her Nan had been once upon a time. Lexa didn't have many friends—Anya was one of the few. It would be kind of nice to add another to the list. Most people didn't stick around, thanks to her busy schedule, and she'd been told (sometimes not so kindly) that she could appear cold and aloof. But Clarke didn't seem to mind either of those things.

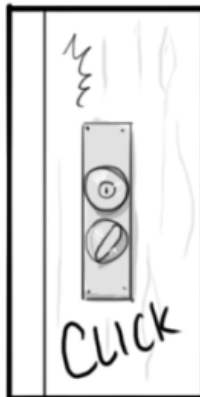
Pretend girlfriends, real friends. I can handle that.

At least, she hoped she could.





ALPHA COMMANDER



ALPHA COMMANDER

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

As always, follow me @raedmagdon on tumblr and please follow @alphacommander too!

“I’m *bored*. ”

Lexa looked up in the middle of zipping her heavy backpack. Clarke was sprawled across the couch, feet up on one armrest and head lolling on the other, two separate bags of chips sitting on her stomach and the TV remote between them.

She did, in fact, look bored.

“Well...” Lexa bit her lip. She couldn’t really do anything to entertain Clarke at the moment. Her next class was starting soon and she wouldn’t be home for several hours. “Maybe you could draw something?”

Clarke looked over the top of the couch at Lexa’s fridge. It was already covered in mechanical pencil doodles on printer paper (since Lexa didn’t exactly have art supplies lying around). The drawings were all disparate—traditional portraits, scribbly abstract landscapes, even some anime. There was scarcely any room to put more up.

“Uh-huh, no. I want to go outside.”

Lexa stifled a groan. She really didn’t have time for this. If she stalled any longer, she was going to be late. “Um...”

“You don’t want to hold me captive in your apartment, do you?” Clarke pushed the chip bags and the remote aside and turned onto her stomach, peering at Lexa over the arm of the couch. “Because honestly, that would be creepy. And you’re trying really hard not to be creepy about this situation.”

Lexa sighed. She *was* trying really hard not to be creepy about this, and Clarke had a point. It wasn’t fair to keep Clarke cooped up in her apartment all the time like some kind of neglected pet. She was a person. Well, a demon, but that was close enough.

“Maybe we can go out when I get back from class?” she suggested. “There’s an ice cream place not far from here...”

“Or,” Clarke suggested, cutting her off, “I could come to class with you. See where you go every day.”

“My classes don’t allow unregistered visitors—”

“Then I’ll wait outside. There’s gotta be a quad or something, right?”

There was, and it had several benches for people to sit on, but Lexa still wasn’t sure. Bringing a demon to class was one of those decisions that had ‘disaster’ written all over it. On the other hand, she couldn’t just leave Clarke in her apartment forever. One of these days, Clarke might decide to follow her without permission.

And I don’t want to think about what that could lead to.

“Fine. You can come—mostly so you know where to find me if you ever need to. But we’re going to set some ground rules, okay? First off, you have to *promise* you’ll keep your clothes on,” Lexa said, her eyes boring into Clarke’s.

Clarke left the couch, tossing her hair. Her horns were currently gone, and her wings and tail were nowhere to be seen either. Wearing one of Lexa’s tank tops and a pair of tight jeans from the thrift store, she looked almost normal. “I know better than to run around naked in public, Lexa. You get arrested for things like that.”

Something about Clarke’s delivery had Lexa convinced the demon was speaking from personal experience. She suspected if she went back and checked newspaper archives from the late sixties, she’d find some kind of record: ‘*Young blonde woman caught streaking in quad, suspected anti-war protester.*’

“Besides,” Clarke continued, “I don’t exactly have a driver’s license or a social security number anymore.”

Lexa took a deep breath. “Okay. Fine.” She pulled out her keys, removing a small golden one from the loop. Her Nan’s charm bracelet jangled on her wrist as she did. “Here’s a spare key. Do *not* lose this in your pile of junk, okay? Replacements cost like fifty bucks a pop.”

Clarke took the key with a longer brush of Lexa’s fingers than necessary. “Thanks. Fresh air at last.” She tossed it a few inches in the air and caught it, repeating the motion with a rhythmic *clink-clink-clink*.

“I wouldn’t go out too late at night if you get the munchies, though,” Lexa said. “This isn’t the greatest neighborhood.”

Clarke smiled—all teeth, and pointed ones at that.

“I’ll keep that in mind... but I don’t think it’s going to be a problem.”



The journey to campus was surprisingly pleasant. Clarke stayed close by Lexa’s side, and aside from making silly faces at someone’s excited pitbull puppy, she mostly behaved herself. Her clothes remained in place and she stayed in her seat during the entire bus ride.

As they arrived at her stop, Lexa finally began to relax. Maybe this wouldn’t be so bad? She’d go to class, Clarke could people watch, and then they could get some ice cream afterwards. Not the worst way to spend an evening.

“Okay,” Lexa said as they arrived at the quad, guiding Clarke toward a bench beneath a large oak tree. “Just stay here so I know where to find you when I’m done. I’ll be in that building over there.” She pointed at one of the brick buildings on the other side of the sidewalk. “My class is two hours long. If you get bored...” She reached into her backpack, pulling out some

paper and a pencil. "Maybe drawing outside won't be as boring as drawing inside. I'd give you a book to read instead, but they're all law books. You probably wouldn't like them."

Clarke took the paper with a smile. "Don't worry about me, Lexa. I won't cause any trouble."

Lexa gave her a skeptical look.

Clarke made an 'X' over her chest. "Promise! Go to class. You don't wanna be late."

With a sigh, Lexa zipped up her backpack and swung it over her shoulder. "Two hours," she repeated, holding up the appropriate number of fingers. "Be here."

"Yeah, yeah. Get going, slowpoke."

Reluctantly, Lexa made her way up the sidewalk. She kind of wished her class wasn't on the other side of the building. If it had been against the south wall, she might have been able to keep an eye on Clarke through the window.

Just to make sure she's safe, Lexa told herself. *Not because I want to stare at her or anything...*

But she knew she wasn't being quite honest with herself. Not that it mattered. She'd keep telling herself whatever she needed to about Clarke until she believed it.

Lexa tapped her fingers restlessly beneath her laptop's keyboard, one knee jiggling under her desk. The seconds on the old fashioned wall clock were ticking by at a painfully slow pace. Class was almost over, but the last five minutes felt more like a year.

She'd tried her best to pay attention, and the notes in front of her were sufficiently detailed, but she hadn't been absorbed by the teacher's lecture. Instead, her thoughts had been with Clarke. What was she doing outside? Would she still be on the bench as promised?

You know, if she did disappear, that would kind of solve my owning-a-demon problem.

She felt guilty for that thought as soon as she had it. In a weird way—and as annoying as Clarke could be—she didn't want Clarke to leave. At least, not before Lexa found some kind of loophole in her contract and discovered a way to free her.

In the middle of her brooding, class ended. Lexa didn't even realize until several people beside her started rustling their supplies and packing up. She blinked, checking the clock again. Apparently, thinking about Clarke made time go faster than listening to her law professor.

Lexa hopped out of her seat, shutting down her laptop as quickly as possible. She shoved it in her backpack, hurrying out the door before the rest of the crowd. Even if Clarke had kept her promise, Lexa still had misgivings about leaving her alone for so long.

Those misgivings proved true as she trotted out the main door, her backpack bouncing precariously off one shoulder. During her absence, an impromptu game of frisbee had started up in the quad—and Clarke's bench was conspicuously empty.

With a growing hole in her stomach, Lexa surveyed the participants running around in the middle of the quad. One leapt up to catch the frisbee, and Lexa couldn't help but notice her bouncing golden curls (or other bouncing things, since she had stripped down to her sports bra).

Clarke. Of course.

Sighing heavily, Lexa hurried over to retrieve her wayward demon. Clarke seemed to notice her at the same time, because she hurried over, grinning from ear to ear and still holding the frisbee. It took an effort of will for Lexa not to look at her exposed midriff, or the dangerous dip of her cleavage.

"Hey, Lexa," Clarke said, breathing happily and heavily.

"Let me guess. Your shirt got lost in some kind of frisbee accident."

"Yeah, kind of." If Clarke noticed the hint of exasperation in Lexa's tone, she didn't let on. Instead, she gestured behind her at the rest of the players. "You should come meet these guys. They say they know you."

As the other students descended on them, Lexa realized that she did, in fact, know most of them. They weren't in any of her law classes, but she recognized them from her philosophy elective. They tended to travel in a pack, and she suspected they had all signed up for the class together on purpose.

"Hey, Woods," one of them said—Bellamy Blake, an impulsive boy who often had trouble reading his own notes. "Clarke here says she's your girlfriend."

"Yes," Lexa mumbled, somewhat under her breath. "That's what she says."

"Nice," another girl chimed in—Raven Reyes, the one who liked to draw robots in the margins of her spiral notebook, even though she took most of her real notes on a laptop like normal people. "I always thought you were kind of a nerd, but if you're Clarke's girlfriend, you must be cooler than I thought."

Lexa almost laughed in disbelief. Clarke had only been hanging out with these people for two hours, and even though *she* had known them for the entire semester, she was now 'Clarke's girlfriend'. It was kind of hilarious, in a sad way. Maybe it was a sign she needed to be friendlier to casual acquaintances.

"So," a second girl said, pale with long brown hair. Octavia, Lexa thought her name was. She was Bellamy's younger sister, and she was here on some kind of athletic scholarship. Maybe field hockey? "You in, Woods? Wanna show us what you've got?"

Lexa opened her mouth to say no, but to her complete surprise, Clarke wrapped an arm through hers, pressing into her side. "Come on, *sweetheart*," Clarke purred beside her ear, leaning in dangerously close. "Let loose a little. Have fun for a change. You're done with class, right?"

"What about ice cream?" Lexa asked weakly—her only hope.

Clarke licked her lips. "I can think of something better for you to eat later if you play with us."

There was a chorus of 'ooohs' from the rest of the group, and Lexa blushed furiously.

Well then. She wasn't going to let Clarke have the last word on this. The demon probably expected her to back out, to make some kind of excuse. Strangely, the thought of proving Clarke wrong excited her, in some juvenile way.

She shrugged her backpack off and set it on the bench Clarke had abandoned. "Give me the frisbee," she said, sticking out her hand. "And Clarke..."

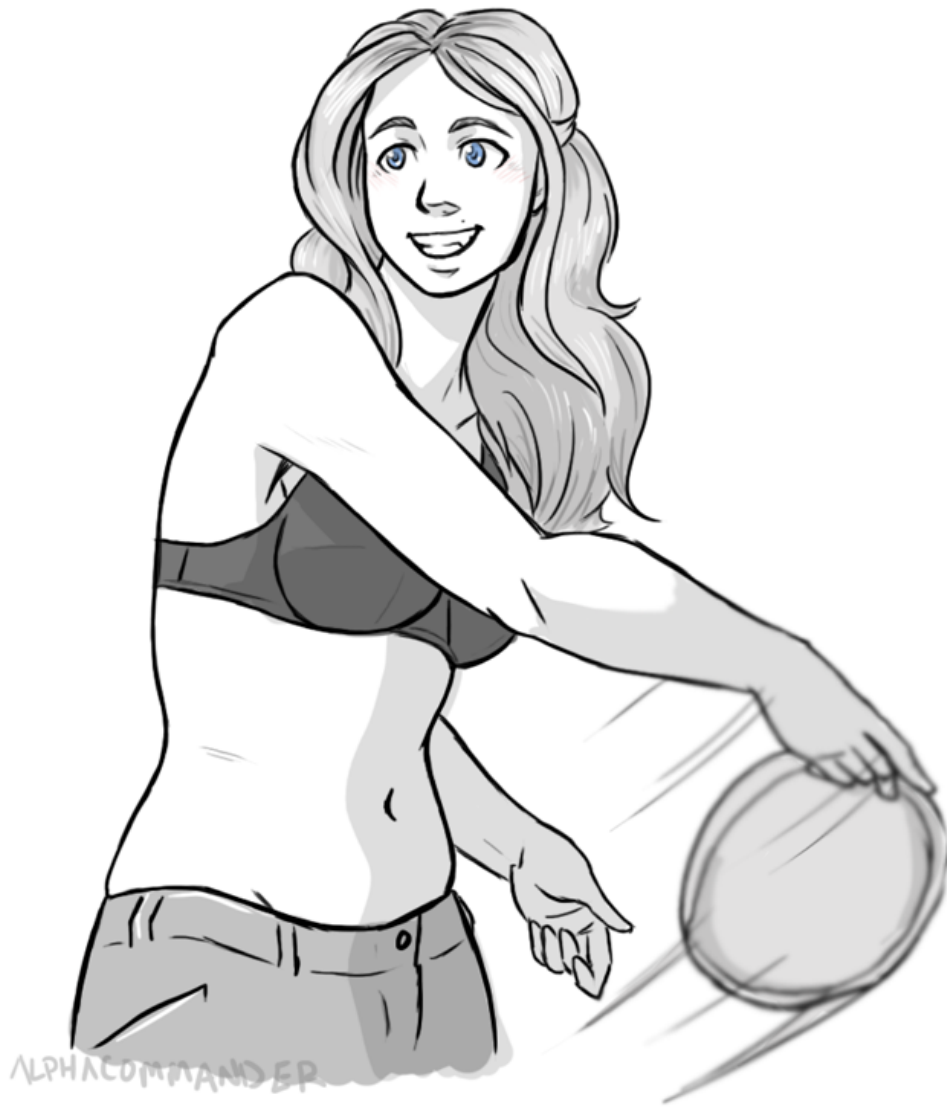
"Hmm?"

"Put your shirt back on."

There were more 'oohs', this time for her benefit. Lexa cracked a smile, which only grew wider as Clarke gave her the frisbee slumped over to the oak tree, where she had draped her shirt over a low-hanging branch. Instead of sliding it back over her head, however, she tied the sleeves around her waist—which only further served to highlight her midriff.

"Well?" Clarke asked, spreading her feet out wide. "What are you waiting for? Throw!"

Lexa drew back her arm. She had a point to prove.



Afterwards, as she and Clarke sat in the ice cream parlor near their apartment, Lexa felt more relaxed than she had all day. Even though her plans had basically gone to shit, she couldn't bring herself to care. She'd had *fun* playing frisbee out on the quad in the fading light—and better still, she'd gotten to see Clarke laugh.

The demon was currently grinning across the table at her, lips smudged with the white bits of her chocolate chip ice cream. The napkin beside her was a crumpled mess, and gooey trails of vanilla were dripping down the cone. As Lexa had come to learn, Clarke was a messy eater.

"Why do you eat food, anyway?" she asked as she watched Clarke lick around the edge of the cone. (It might have been her imagination, but she was pretty sure Clarke's tongue was longer than a normal human's was supposed to be.)

Clarke merely shrugged and reached for her sopping napkin.

"Why not?"

"I mean... you said before that you..."

"Eat human emotions? Yeah. That's kind of a thing we succubi do." She gave Lexa a smirk that could only be described as flirtatious. "And trust me, I got a very filling meal today. But human food is fun too. We can still taste it, even if it doesn't fill us up. And there's the nostalgia factor."

"You miss it from when you were human," Lexa said, a statement, not a question.

There was a flicker of sadness in Clarke's eyes. Suddenly, she wasn't flirtatious anymore. "Yeah. I miss a lot of things about being human. Food, family, friends, a normal routine. Don't get me wrong, being a demon isn't so bad. You get an extended life, some pretty cool powers, and meet a lot of interesting people."

"Would you give it up if you could?" Lexa asked. She'd simply assumed Clarke would want to turn back into a human—hence her constant pestering for more details about Clarke's soul contract—but she'd never thought to question that assumption before.

Clarke took a moment to think about it. Lexa could see her mind working behind her bright blue eyes. "Honestly? I don't know." A small, adorable furrow appeared in her forehead, one that tugged at Lexa's heartstrings. "When I left my old life, I knew there was no going back. I guess it'd depend on if I found a good reason to start a new one."

"Well," Lexa said, somewhat hesitantly, "I guess there's no rush. You've got time to figure it out."

"Do I?" Clarke asked. "What happened to getting me out of your apartment as soon as possible?"

Lexa shrugged. "I've... gotten used to you over the past week or so. It's not so bad having a roommate. And a friend. Assuming you want to be my friend. As you've probably noticed, I'm a loner, so I could use one."

"You have Anya," Clarke reminded her.

"Yeah, Anya, who will be suspicious if be 'break up' too soon. She already thinks I'm crazy for having a secret girlfriend."

Clarke laughed. "So I'm your secret girlfriend now?"

Fire blazed in Lexa's cheeks. "You're not my girlfriend, Clarke. You're a demon."

"*Your* demon," Clarke corrected. "Which is basically close to the same thing. But fine. I'll let you off the hook. And Lexa..."

"Hmm?"

"You're dripping rocky road on your shirt."

"Oh, crap."

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

.... next chapter is... steamier... (it's not quite time for banging yet but... sorry for the slow burn, there WILL be lots of very explicit sex, I promise!!!)

As always, follow me on tumblr @raedmagdon and the wonderful artist @alphacommander because she does a fantastic job making illustrations for the chapters!

“Lexa? Hey, Lexa!”

The front door to the apartment swung open, banging against the wall on its way. Lexa looked up from her computer, a smile spreading across her face despite the interruption. Usually, she hated being disturbed in the middle of working on something, but over the past two weeks, Clarke had become the exception.

Her new room mate was loud, distracting, and incredibly messy (although Lexa had to admit, it was a *contained* mess that only existed in one place). But for some reason, a reason Lexa couldn't put her finger on, Clarke never failed to brighten her mood.

“Hello, Clarke. Did you get what we needed at the grocery store?”

“Yup.” The sound of rustling bags and rattling keys followed as Clarke moved her haul into the apartment from the hallway. “Bread, milk, eggs, chocolate chips...”

“I don't remember putting chocolate chips on the list,” Lexa said with a slight frown.

“For chocolate chip cookies, *and* I used a coupon,” Clarke protested. “Besides, I know I'm not the only one with a sweet tooth.”

Lexa sighed. Clarke really was sabotaging her attempts to eat healthy. “Fine. We'll make cookies, but *after* I finish my work.”

“Whatcha working on?” Clarke asked, turning her back as she carried the first of the bags into the kitchen.

“Nothing,” Lexa said casually—which was precisely the wrong answer. For someone so secretive about her own past prior to becoming Lexa's demon, Clarke could sniff out a lie from a mile away.

“Nothing, huh?” Clarke dropped the bags on the kitchen counter without unloading them and headed back into the living room, peering over the couch. “This doesn't seem like nothing to me.” Lexa closed her laptop, but not soon enough. “Researching demon bargains? Why are you so eager to get rid of me? I thought you liked having me around.”

Lexa pushed her laptop aside and turned around on the couch to face Clarke. “I do. Like having you around, I mean. I'm not trying to banish you, just free you.”

“Uh-huh.” Clarke folded her arms across her chest, eyes narrowed. “Well, you won't figure out how to do that on Google. Besides, I told you, the only way to free me is to let me do you a great service. And it can't be something you just make up on a whim. It has to be life-changing.”

“That frees you from me, but not from your contract,” Lexa pointed out. “I want you to be free-free. Come on, I know a person as, um, free-spirited as you has to hate being trapped this way.”

Clarke sighed and shook her head. “Lexa... you're sweet, but you really don't know what you're talking about. I chose this for a reason—”

“But you won't tell me what that reason is.”

“Nope. No way. We've been over this.”

“Worth another try. So... cookies?”

Clarke's smile returned. "I knew you'd come around. Come on, lawyer girl, it's time to stuff our faces with sugar."

The cookies came out of the oven hot and gooey, although minus a couple of chocolate chips, because Clarke had taken to munching straight from the bag. Lexa inhaled as she pulled the tray from the oven, savoring the smell. "Mmm. The best part about making cookies is how they make your apartment smell good for the rest of the day..."

Clarke chuckled. "Isn't that what those expensive candles of yours are for?"

"Yeah, but you can't eat candles."

"Technically, you can. You just wouldn't like them."

Lexa heaved a sigh, adjusting her glasses. "You're kind of an ass, you know that?"

Clarke smirked, her tail flicking from side to side. "You *like* my ass."

"Stop that. You know the flirting embarrasses me."

Clarke shrugged, her expression unrepentant. "Hey, a girl's gotta eat somehow."

"So, uh..." Lexa's face flushed. "How much of a human's emotions can you feel, anyway? How do you know what's going on in their head?"

"Are you asking if I can read your mind?" Clarke's implication was obvious, and Lexa's cheeks burned hotter. She did her best to keep a neutral face, something she thankfully had a lot of practice at.

"I suppose I am."

"The best way I can describe it is, when I look at you, I can see a certain aura. It's almost like a glow that changes color."

Lexa's brow furrowed. "Like a flashing rainbow?"

"More like a kaleidoscope. Some people have just a few colors going on at any one time, some people have loads. Some are dull, some are bright..."

"What do I look like?" Lexa couldn't help asking.

"Hmm." Clarke popped her lips thoughtfully, before reaching for one of the cooling cookies on the tray. She shoved it into her mouth, chewing loudly.

"Come on," Lexa protested. "Don't torture me. What do I look like?"

Clarke swallowed. "Well, just then you were annoyed, so you flashed kind of orange. I get that color a lot from you, actually..."

"Well, you do keep a huge mess in the middle of my living room and embarrass me in front of my friends."

"... except on days when you're grey-blue."

"Grey-blue days?"

"Depressed days," Clarke said. "I know you get them. But that would have been obvious even without seeing your emotions. Then there are 'yellow' days... the days when you're anxious about school, or whatever."

Lexa's eyes widened as sudden realization washed over her. On those days—yellow days—Clarke did seem to remain on her best behavior, almost as though she were taking it upon herself to keep the atmosphere calm. She often dimmed the lights without being asked and kept her voice at a lower volume. She also always announced her presence softly when entering a room.

"Wow. So do I always walk around blue and yellow?"

"Not as much as you think." Clarke stepped closer, close enough for Lexa to stiffen awkwardly as her brain fought to decide whether she should retreat or stand her ground. She did, only to find her back pressed against the counter, which she gripped

nervously with both hands. Clarke stepped forward again, placing her hands outside of Lexa's and leaning close. "Most of the time," she continued, her voice low, "when you look at me, I see a deep, throbbing red over everything else."

Lexa's cheeks turned the exact color Clarke had described. She tried to speak, but nothing came out but a small moan of confusion. Luckily for her, Clarke took pity. Instead of leaning forward and bringing their lips together, as Lexa both hoped and feared she might, Clarke drew back.

"Well," she said, licking her lips, "that filled me up for the day. You're so easy to tease, Lexa."

Lexa sighed, pinching the bridge of her forehead and removing her glasses. Clarke had fogged up the lenses, so she wiped them on her shirt. "That wasn't nice."

"You don't want me to starve, do you?" Clarke shoved another cookie into her mouth, and Lexa did the same. Her mouth had started watering, but not from anticipating the chocolate.

I really need to get a handle on this, she thought to herself. I can't help Clarke if I keep thinking about what it would be like to kiss her. How good she'd probably taste... how soft her lips would be...

"So, how are they?"

Lexa blinked. Clarke was looking at her, head cocked curiously. There was a smudge of chocolate at the corner of her mouth, and Lexa's filthy mind couldn't help imagining what it would be like to lick it off.

"The cookies," Clarke clarified with a knowing smirk. "How are they?"

"Uh, really good." The low throb between Lexa's legs only grew worse. "Gotta pee," she mumbled, making a break for the bathroom. She needed to put some distance between her and Clarke, or she was going to make a really big mistake.

Later that evening, she found herself lounging with Clarke in the living room. Clarke was playing on Lexa's very old DS, the one she hadn't touched since graduating high school, while Lexa struggled through her homework. As nice as it was to have Clarke around, the demon really was taking a toll on her GPA.

When she gazed at Clarke over her laptop, however, she forgot her annoyance. Clarke looked absolutely adorable, the tip of her tongue peeking out, eyes narrowed in concentration. Her tail lashed back and forth in agitation like a cat stalking its prey.

Eventually, though, Clarke noticed her. "What?"

It took Lexa a moment to come up with a response. Sometimes just looking at Clarke made her forget all her words. "The music. Can you turn it down? I keep losing my place every time you catch a pokemon."

Clarke shrugged. "Sure, spoilsport." She turned the volume down, pouting a little. "It's not like I missed an entire cultural phenomenon or anything waiting for my next Master to call me."

"Hey, I'm working on fixing your demon problem," Lexa protested. "Not with any help from you, of course."

"You can help me by getting comfortable with this arrangement." Clarke shifted, resting her feet on top of Lexa's outstretched legs instead of the ottoman they clearly could have both shared. "I like living here with you. You should relax and enjoy it too. Maybe invite Anya over to hang out with both of us like she's been demanding."

Lexa's eyes widened. "How do you know about that?"

"You don't text anyone but her and you get this cute, annoyed look on your face whenever your phone buzzes. I assume she wants to come over and inspect your new girlfriend for real this time."

That was a good point. Anya would undoubtedly insist on a girlfriend inspection sooner or later. Since it was inevitable, it might as well be sooner. "Okay."

Clarke looked at her in surprise, golden eyebrows arching so high her forehead wrinkled. "Okay? You're not going to fight me on this?"

Lexa wiggled her socked feet back and forth beneath Clarke's calves. "Nope."

"Really?"

“Yup.”

“No arguments at all?”

“No arguments at all.”

Clarke snorted, but the smile on her face told Lexa that she was pleased—which made Lexa feel strangely pleased in turn.

“I promise not to embarrass you, okay? And I’ll only cling a little. Enough to be convincing as your fake girlfriend.”

Lexa felt the strange urge to flinch at the word ‘fake’. Honestly, during some of the moments she spent with Clarke, she forgot they were faking this whole thing. They hadn’t even kissed (no matter how many times she’d imagined it in her mind). Her principles wouldn’t allow her to take advantage of someone who was technically her slave.

If I know nothing can ever happen between us while she’s my demon, why am I so upset when I remember it’s all an act?

Part of Lexa suspected why. The logical train of thought led in a clear direction. Still, it was a trail she was unwilling to follow, especially while Clarke was staring at her with those wide, baby blue eyes.

“It will be good for you to meet more people,” Lexa said, not really paying attention to her own words. “Anya isn’t bad once you get to know her. She’ll like you.”

“And why do you think that?” Clarke wiggled closer, ostensibly slouching down to use the arm of the couch as a headrest, until her rear was tucked against Lexa’s right thigh. Once more, Lexa was struck by their intimate position: on the couch together, almost cuddling, limbs crossed. Anyone who walked in would have assumed they were lovers.

She shook herself. *Discipline. Control your brain.*

“Because I like you,” Lexa said when she realized Clarke was still waiting for an answer.

“Aww,” Clarke said, bestowing her with a sharp-toothed smile. Her tail coiled around Lexa’s calf, giving it a friendly, almost affectionate squeeze. “You say the sweetest things. I didn’t even ask for dessert.”

For once, Lexa didn’t blush at Clarke’s flirting. She just chuckled. “When have you ever turned down dessert, Clarke?”

“Good point.”

They spent the rest of the evening that way, with Lexa eventually completing her homework, and Clarke playing her videogame. It was quiet and peaceful, although Clarke did let out a loud “*Fuck*” that almost made Lexa drop her water bottle when Zapdos got away.

After a few hours, the two of them wandered to bed together without really consulting each other, slipping into a familiar routine.

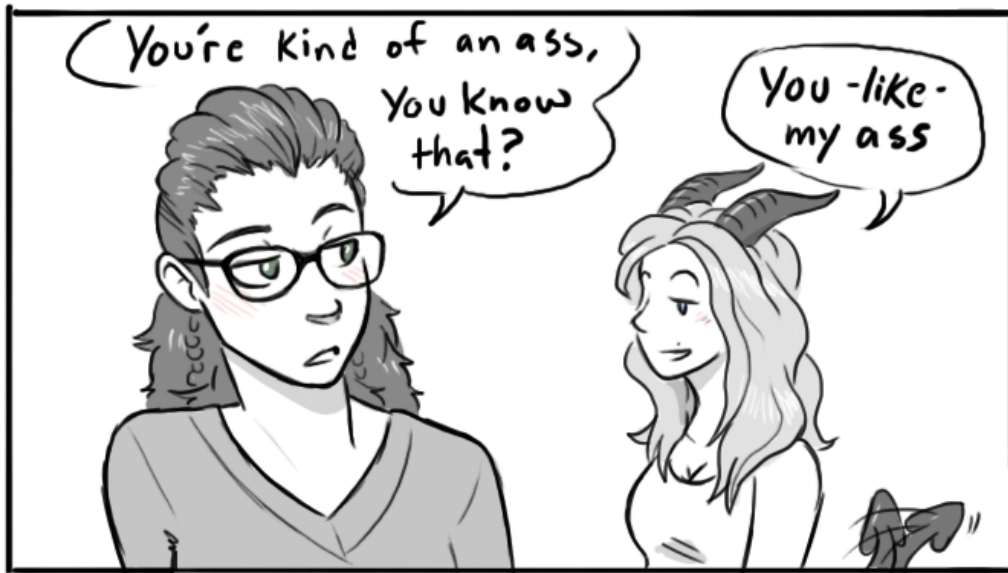
Lexa showered first, forcing herself to make it quick and cold for once. (Clarke had already had a dramatic effect on the apartment’s water bill, and she wasn’t even the one using all of the extra water.) Once she was clean and dry, she changed into a shirt and some boxers and headed for bed, leaving the bathroom to Clarke. They passed each other on the way, and Lexa wasn’t surprised to see that Clarke had already dispensed with her clothes.

“I have a bathrobe you can use,” Lexa said, focusing on the blank white wall beside her bedroom door.

Clarke just laughed, as if the idea was ridiculous, and swayed past her, tail swishing after. It took a Herculean effort for Lexa to avoid stealing a glimpse of her backside. To help resist temptation, she removed her glasses, and kept them off even after the bathroom door clicked shut. Heaving a sigh of relief, she entered the bedroom, reaching to switch off the light before she remembered that Clarke would need it to find the bed. Sometimes, she still acted out the same habits she’d developed while living alone.

But it’s nice, she thought as she crawled under the covers and set her phone alarm. *Not being alone for a change*. Lexa had remained convinced that she would be alone for several years during and after law school, if not for her entire life. She’d never enjoyed living with other people. The brief stints she’d spent with room mates during her undergrad years had been annoying, to say the least. But Clarke... living with Clarke was different, and it terrified her to consider why.

Lexa dozed off to the hiss of the shower, deliberately putting all those thoughts from her mind. They would only lead in circles.



Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

So, the chapter took a while because FCKING @alphacommander DREW THREE FCKING PAGES I WAS NOT PREPARED!!!!!!!! AAAAAAAHHHHH~

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See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

“Lexa?”

As Lexa emerged from the thick black ocean of sleep, wading from the depths into the smoother shallows, the corners of her lips twitched into a soft smile. That voice, the voice saying her name—it was low and raspy, but somehow soothing. And also familiar...

“Lexa...”

The voice made her want to reach out, to find smooth skin with her palms. It relaxed every muscle in her body even as her heart throbbed just a bit harder. She could feel a response vibrating in her own throat, a name that brought a curious warmth to the center of her chest.

“Lexa, wake up.”

She squinted against the lances of bright yellow sunshine piercing her eyes, raising a hand to shield her forehead. A figure was standing in front of her, blurry at first, but becoming clearer with each heavy blink: a curvy goddess wrapped in a cloak of glowing sunbeams. The glittering strands of her hair shone like a crown despite the thin, twisting horns spiraling up from her head.

The name Lexa had been trying to form slipped free in an affectionate whisper. “Clarke...”

Clarke smirked at her, looking much less ethereal but still just as beautiful, her blue eyes glinting with amusement. “Hey, sleepyhead. Fell asleep with your law books again, huh?”

Lexa suddenly realized she was indeed trapped beneath one of her textbooks. It was open on her chest, although she’d been so distracted by Clarke’s appearance that she hadn’t noticed. Tempted further, she stole another glance, secretly pleased to see that Clarke was wearing a curve-hugging tank top—one she had stolen from Lexa’s dresser. (Lexa was even more pleased to note that Clarke had forgone wearing a bra, although she tried not to stare too intently.)

“Sorry,” she mumbled, suddenly realizing she hadn’t answered.

Clarke bent down, giving Lexa an unanticipated view straight down the front of the borrowed shirt. A thick lump rose in Lexa’s throat, and as Clarke’s plump pink lips drew closer, she almost wondered if she was still dreaming and Clarke was going to kiss her. Instead, Clarke removed the book, closing it and setting it on the ottoman.

“Why did you come out here, anyway? You could have stayed in bed with me and read. The window was open anyway.”

Lexa shook herself as subtly as possible, snapping out of the daydream.

Stupid. Why would she kiss me now, of all times?

“You looked peaceful in bed. I didn’t want to wake you.”

Your body is so soft and warm when you sleep. I was afraid I’d end up snuggling with you again, and I can’t handle that right now.

“Obviously, you weren’t ready to get up either.” Clarke perched on the ottoman, placing a palm on Lexa’s thigh. “You might want to run a comb through your hair and brush your teeth. It’s almost noon.”

“Wait, really?” Lexa groped for her phone, which had sunk partway between two of the couch cushions. She sighed when she saw that Clarke was right. It wasn’t like her to sleep in, but despite dozing off early the previous night, she hadn’t gotten much sleep. Her nights were filled with fever-dreams, and when she woke, Clarke’s warm body was always twined with hers in some terrible, wonderful way. “Ugh. Anya will be here in half an hour.”

“Ugh, huh?” Clarke teased. “I’ll be sure to tell your best friend how excited you are to grab lunch with her.” She squeezed Lexa’s thigh just above the knee, and to her utter embarrassment, Lexa let a small whisper escape. Her eyes widened slightly to see if Clarke had noticed the sound—which, of course, the demon had. Her eyes flashed darker and her soft pink tongue rolled slowly over her lower lip.

“You’re red right now, Lexa,” she murmured, and although she didn’t inch her fingers any higher, Lexa could feel them burning through her sleep pants.

“Red?” Distracted as she was, it took Lexa a moment to remember what Clarke had said the other day about colors. Her face turned the same color as it came back to her, and she sat up straighter, clearing her throat awkwardly. She wasn’t sure whether she was pleased or disappointed when Clarke didn’t remove her hand. “Oh. I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be sorry.” Clarke’s tone wasn’t seductive anymore, but that didn’t much matter—to Lexa, just about everything she said and did was entrancing. “Thanks for breakfast.”

A few weeks ago, Lexa would have been annoyed at Clarke’s teasing. Today, she actually smirked a little. Clarke’s odd sense of humor was starting to grow on her. “Glad to be of service. I hope the side order of humiliation went well with the rest of the meal.”

Clarke winked. “It added to the heat.”

“Heat?” Lexa swallowed awkwardly. “Like, it tastes spicy to you, or...”

Clarke didn’t answer. She laughed and stood up, brushing her fingers along the side of Lexa’s arm. Lexa watched her head for the nest, which was still in the middle of the room, and—somewhat miraculously—begin to carry the most offensive pieces of garbage over to the trash can in the kitchen.

“I don’t want Anya to judge me,” Clarke said in response to Lexa’s wordless look of surprise. “You, I don’t have to impress with my cleaning skills. My tits already did that when we met. But for Anya, I’m going to have to work a little harder.”

“That’s kind of rude, you know,” Lexa said, although she didn’t deny it. “I don’t just leer at...” She hesitated. A few seconds ago, she had indeed been staring, although in her defense, she’d been half asleep at the time. “Well, if I *was* going to have a girlfriend someday, I wouldn’t pick her for her... you know.”

Clarke emerged from the nest with another armful of junk, for which Lexa was somewhat grateful, because it acted as a shield for her chest. “Yeah,” the demon said, obviously not convinced.

“It’s true,” Lexa insisted. “She’d have to be smart, curious, compassionate, responsible...”

“A good cook,” Clarke suggested wryly.

“That would be a nice bonus. She’d have to have her own interests and goals so she’s not lonely while I’m busy at work, but always be glad to see me when I get home.”

“You don’t want a housewife in pearls waiting to greet you at six with a martini?”

Lexa coughed, her flow interrupted. “Well, uh...”

“Independent but affectionate? Self-sufficient but devoted?”

“Yes, I suppose—”

“Lexa?”

“What?”

Lexa suddenly realized that Clarke was looking at her rather intently. The demon’s expression was still obviously amused, but there was a more serious tension underneath, a worried sort of firmness around her eyes and mouth that Lexa picked up on immediately.

“Not to talk myself up, but add blonde hair and a tail, and you basically described me. You know that, right?”

Lexa began to protest, but words failed her.

Clarke was smart. The demon was easily able to follow along during their more complex conversations—a rare ability, Lexa had realized. Before she had matured and withdrawn into more of an introvert, her few attempts at extroversion in middle and high school had been met with mostly blank stares. Clarke also had a talent for manipulation, since Lexa often found herself doing things she couldn't imagine herself agreeing to, like chasing after a flyaway frisbee in the quad only to land in the mud on Clarke's urging. It was a good thing Clarke used her powers of persuasion for good and wasn't interested in becoming a lawyer, because Lexa suspected she'd be terrifying to go up against in court.

As for curious, Clarke was definitely that, from her desire to leave the apartment at every opportunity, to her propensity for befriending total strangers, to her adorable excitement about all the new, everyday changes that had occurred in the world during her decades-long absence from it.

Compassionate and responsible fit too. Despite Clarke's propensity for mischief, Lexa remembered all the times Clarke had brought her blankets, reminded her to eat, and cleaned the apartment despite Lexa's insistence that she didn't have to. It didn't feel like the work of a slave anymore, and Lexa was pretty sure Clarke was doing it simply because she wanted to be helpful. The demon even kept her on a regular sleep schedule that wasn't fueled by caffeine and desperation.

"I don't just keep my nest because it's cozy," Clarke said after a while, snapping Lexa out of her stupor.

Lexa's cheeks flushed with embarrassment, but she managed to keep her face fairly blank otherwise. "What do you mean?"

"I kept waiting for you to tell me to get rid of it."

"Why would I do that?"

Clarke gave a tiny shrug. "You like things neat and clean. My pile of junk is an eyesore, right in the middle of the living room. That's how you get ants."

"I'll call the landlord and have someone come spray—"

"No, Lexa. Without even being asked, you let me have a safe place. A place you didn't try to assert control over. You could have, you know. I'm your demon. If you'd ordered me to clean it up, I would have."

Lexa remained silent, unsure what to say.

"But you didn't. And I think it's because deep down, you instinctively knew I needed to feel like I had control over something, even if that something was just a pile of useless crap in a strange girl's apartment. You weren't wrong back when you said you were surprised someone like me would choose to be a demon. I'm stubborn. I don't like being ordered around."

"So why stay one?" Lexa asked softly. "Why not let me help you figure out how to get out of your contract?"

Clarke averted her eyes. "It's complicated. My point is, I have all these things you're looking for... and you have something I'm looking for, too."

Lexa waited for the joke, for Clarke's easy flirting to return, but it didn't. The only thing on her face was raw honesty.

"What do you think I have?" she asked.

Clarke took a deep breath. "You care. You care a whole damn lot. You have a desire to help people, even a strange demon who poofs into existence in your kitchen. And don't think I'm unaware of the reasons you want to become a lawyer, either. They're way more altruistic than most of your classmates might think."

Something compelled Lexa to stand up from the couch. She took a step around it, and Clarke did the same, until the furniture wasn't between them anymore and they were looking at each other directly. Clarke reached out to touch her wrist, slowly taking her hand.

"You know what I think? I think the rest of the world is stupid not to see what I see. Because the people who think you're too quiet or too cold? They don't know what a big, open heart you have under all that, and that's their loss."

Lexa remained speechless. The words struck so powerfully that it stopped her brain completely. An ache opened in her chest, so intense that a shudder rolled down her spine, but it didn't hurt. In fact, it felt almost... right?

She knew their relationship wasn't on equal footing. Even though she had never given Clarke a single order, they were still master and slave. That made all of this, all the things she secretly longed for, impossible. And yet.

Clarke had seen her. Seen straight through her.

Lexa had gone through most of her life alone, practically overflowing with love, but unsure how to offer it to someone else. Most of her clumsy attempts had failed. So she had studied, and worked, and worked some more, and poured all of her love into her educations and her ambitions, even though it wasn't quite the same.

Her Nan had understood. That was why Lexa had felt her grandmother's loss so deeply. Her Nan had always told her that, someday, she would find someone, a special person who saw the flame underneath the frost and realized how warm she really was.

She just hadn't expected that person not to be a person at all.

Lexa didn't realize she was leaning in until Clarke's lips were only a breath away from hers. They were soft and full, parted in expectation, and Lexa could feel gentle heat radiating from them when Clarke breathed.

Would it be so terrible to kiss her? Clarke had said it herself: when Lexa had described her perfect woman, the answer had been staring her in the face the whole time. Maybe it wouldn't be wrong to try. Maybe...

She ran her fingertips along Clarke's cheek, her hand shaking. Then, slowly, she tilted her head as Clarke gazed at her with bottomless blue eyes.

A loud knock on the door shattered the moment into a hundred pieces.

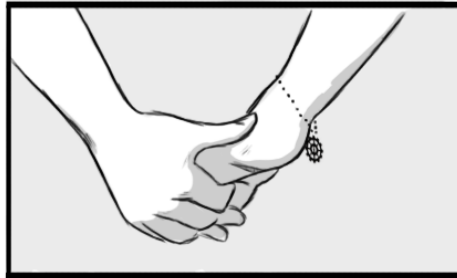
Lexa flinched away, while Clarke sighed in extreme annoyance, and then scowled deeply.

"Tell her to fuck off," she pleaded, but Lexa knew it was too late. The spell was broken. The weight of responsibility settled on her shoulders again.

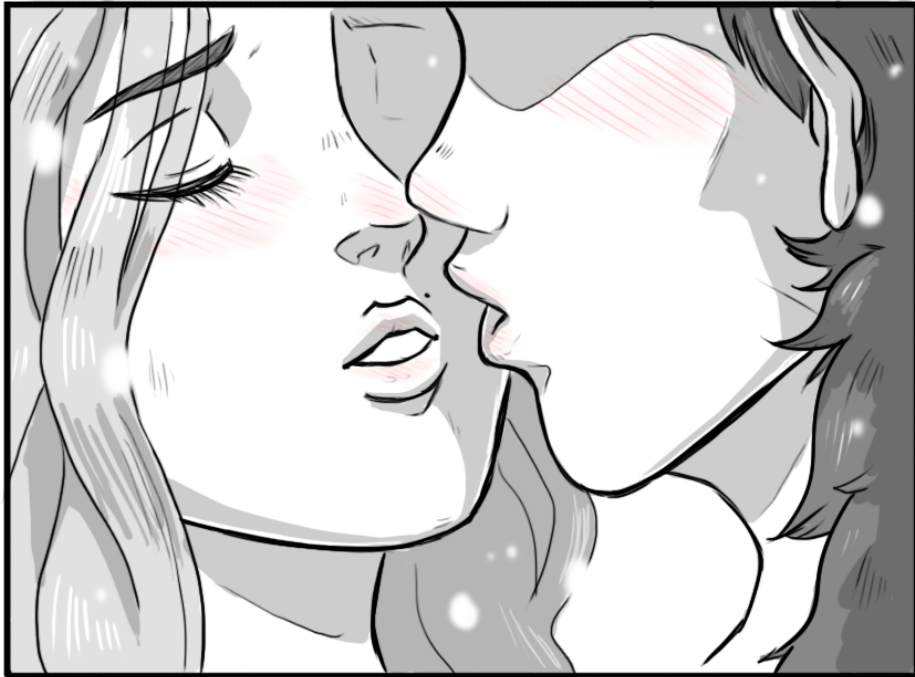
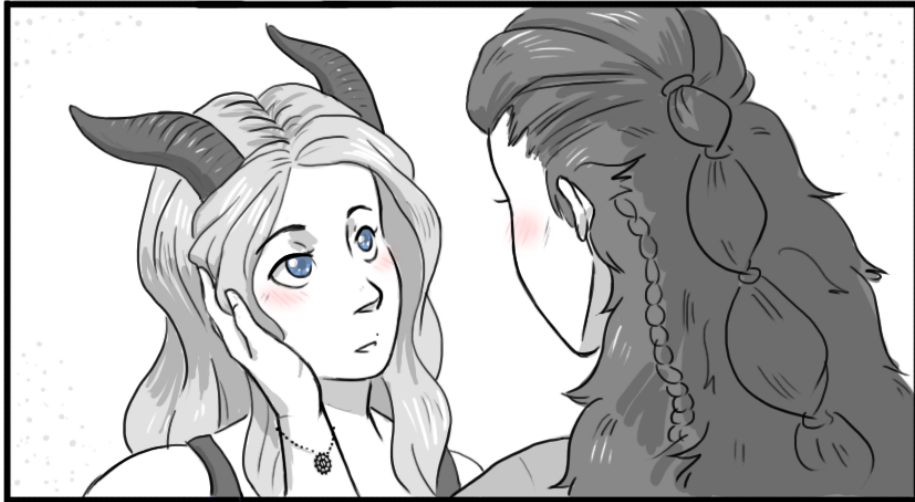
"She'll just come in anyway," Lexa said.

I'm sorry. You don't know how sorry I am.

Clarke folded her arms over her chest, and Lexa turned away, giving the demon one last apologetic look. For now, at least, they needed to play hosts. And since their ruse was rushing rapidly toward a dangerous reality, she wasn't sure where the lines were drawn anymore.



ALPHACOMMANDER.TUMBLR





Chapter End Notes

Don't kill me for the almost-kiss! I promise the real one is coming very very very very soon. Not next chapter but...
*cough*thechapterafternext*cough*

Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

Heyyy, small warning for a NSFW drawing at the end of the chap! Lexa gets her freak on a little.

I have to thank @alphacommander for the fantastic art. She is so talented, and fast too! Follow her on tumblr! :D

(And you can follow me too @raedmagdon)

Lexa paused at the front door, pasting on a big smile. Anya almost certainly wouldn't buy the act, but she had to try. Even an unconvincing lie was better than the truth: that Clarke wasn't her girlfriend, but her demon, and they were bound together by a strange magical spell she didn't even understand.

Her chest constricted, and the air she'd pulled in came shuddering out as her thoughts began to spiral out of control. *What am I even thinking? Anya's going to see right through me. She'll pull the truth out of me, like she always does, and then she won't believe that either. She'll think I'm crazy and she'll call my parents and I'll have to leave school and go back to—*

"Lexa?"

Lexa flinched, jerking her hand away from where it had been hovering near the door knob. Clarke stood one step behind her, wearing a look of concern.

"You're bright yellow," Clarke murmured. "What can I do to help?"

Help? Lexa gave a shaky laugh, struggling to ignore the frantic, dizzying thud in her chest. It wasn't enough that Clarke was heart-stoppingly beautiful, and had been less than an inch from kissing her mere moments ago. She'd summoned probably the only demon in existence who was empathetic to her anxiety disorder.

Even though Lexa didn't answer, Clarke seemed to know what to do. After a moment's pause to make sure her touch was welcome, she wrapped her fingers around Lexa's hand. The comforting warmth stopped Lexa's teeth from grinding and eased the lances of pain in her lungs. At least she didn't have to do this alone.

Lexa looked over at Clarke, who gave her an encouraging nod. She opened the door.

Anya was waiting in the hallway, head tilted down, thumbs flying over her phone. When she looked up, her expression read mild annoyance mixed with a hint of relief. "Lexa. I was about to text you."

"Sorry," Lexa rasped. Her throat had gone dry, and she had to swallow before speaking again. "I was... today's been hard."

Anya lifted one brow in a subtle gesture of surprise. She looked at Lexa, then Clarke, and finally at their joined hands. Lexa could practically see her climbing the ladder of inference: *Lexa's a nxiety, public admission, Clarke knows. They're close.*

When Anya spoke, however, it was only to ask, "Should I come in?"

"Of course!" Clarke said. "Hey. I know we've met before, but... I'm Clarke. Nice to officially meet you for real." She gripped Anya's hand for a friendly shake without dropping Lexa's, and backed into the apartment so Anya could enter—somehow without making the stream of motions clumsy or awkward.

Lexa closed the door behind them. She forced herself to exhale. So far, so good.

Anya glanced around the apartment, giving it a quick but shrewd scan. Her gaze settled on Clarke's nest, which she hadn't finished straightening, and once more, Lexa could practically hear her friend's brain rattling off conclusions behind her dark eyes: *Messy living room. Clarke. The rest of the place is clean. Is she making Lexa do all the work?*

"Yeah, that's my nest," Clarke said when she noticed where Anya was looking, still speaking in her friendly voice. "I help keep the rest of the place tidy as a trade-off for Lexa, uh, tolerating it."

Anya shot Clarke a glance, and once more, her face registered faint surprise. "Oh?"

"I'm between jobs for now, so... TV and video games are a thing that happens sometimes," Clarke said, shrugging the shoulder and arm that weren't attached to Lexa through their linked hands. "Don't worry, I'm not planning to be a mooch forever, I promise. Lexa's just been so awesome to let me stay here."

A little more of Lexa's anxiety faded, and she couldn't help being impressed. It was a believable lie. Not for the first time, she considered the fact that Clarke might make an excellent lawyer herself.

Anya's face remained neutral. She turned to face Clarke directly, folding her arms across her chest. "Clarke, you seem to be under the impression that I'm here for some kind of 'girlfriend inspection'."

Clarke's smile faded, although she didn't frown either. "Aren't you?"

Anya offered a tentative smile. "Well... just a little. I'm sure you're really nice. It just confused me when Lexa said she had a girlfriend *and* roommate I hadn't even heard about."

Lexa didn't miss the subtle note of hurt in the statement, and she knew it was meant for her.

"I'm sorry, Anya. I just—I didn't want to screw it up? I haven't had a 'girlfriend' since tenth grade, and I can't really count those two awkward flings in undergrad. I don't know what the protocol is for, you know, telling everyone about an actual relationship."

Clarke's sparkling blue eyes flicked over toward her for the briefest moment, and Lexa didn't miss the question in them. *College flings?*

Lexa returned the look with a sheepish smile. She wasn't sure whether Clarke was curious for more details, amused by her low number of sexual partners, or... jealous? She dismissed that possibility quickly. Clarke wasn't the jealous type, and they weren't even actually dating. But maybe...?

She focused back on Anya. To her relief, her friend nodded in acceptance. "We're cool, Lexa. Don't worry about it."

"Bitchin'," Clarke said, her grin returning full force. "So since the awkward part's over, wanna watch a movie or something? I'll make snacks!"

When Anya nodded in agreement, Clarke let go of Lexa's hand. Lexa felt a small pang at the loss of Clarke's soft fingers, but then something even softer brushed against her cheek, and her entire face burned with a scorching blush.

Clarke. Clarke's lips. Clarke's lips had touched her skin. *Clarke kissed me.*

Sure, it wasn't on the lips, so it didn't really count... and it was just for Anya's benefit... and it was only for a second... but that didn't stop the joyful echo that thundered through Lexa's head: *Clarke kissed me. Clarke kissed me? Clarke kissed me!*

"I'll make kettle corn," Clarke said while Lexa continued struggling to remember how breathing worked. Her hand, freed from Lexa's shaking grip, darted in for a quick squeeze of Lexa's ass before she departed for the kitchen.

Lexa choked on a yelp. Her belly exploded with butterflies and she couldn't tell whether her heart was pounding between her ears or her legs. *Clarke squeezed my ass. Clarke squeezed my ass. Oh God, Clarke—*

"Bitchin'?" Anya repeated quietly once Clarke was out of earshot, giving Lexa an amused look.

That was finally enough to snap Lexa out of her daze, at least a little. It took her several seconds to figure out that Anya had no clue about the significance of the kiss or the ass-grope, and also to connect Anya's wry smirk with Clarke's weird use of slang.

"Um," she whispered back, unable to help stealing a glance at Clarke. She was rummaging around in the pantry, slightly bent over in a way that made her rear stick out at an all-too-appealing angle. "Her grandparents were hippies?"

"Huh," Anya said, eyebrows knitting together. "I would've thought 1980s-era stoner parents." Lexa merely blinked, which Anya seemed to take as a silent judgment. "I don't know? Not trying to be an ass, she just gives off that vibe."

"I like her vibe," Lexa said, a little indignant.

"Hey, me too. I mean, I like her as much as I can like someone I've known five minutes." Anya took a step closer, reaching out and hesitating only when her hand was an inch away from Lexa's arm. When Lexa nodded permission, she squeezed. "I just want you to be happy, kid. If Clarke makes you happy, *I'm* happy."

"Thanks, An," Lexa sighed. "Means a lot."

Anya let go of her arm and gave the air a sniff. “She doesn’t smoke weed in here though, right? I mean, that shit gets in the carpet and you can kiss your deposit goodbye.”

“No,” Lexa groaned, pinching the bridge of her forehead. “No, she doesn’t smoke, and definitely not in here.”

“Wait, did Anya bring pot?” Clarke asked, returning from the kitchen with a steaming bowl in her hand.

“No,” Lexa said again, more insistently.

“Hey you.” Clarke flicked a piece of fresh kettle corn into her mouth, moaning in appreciation, before handing the bowl to Lexa. “Relax, baby. I’m kidding. So, movie?”

When Clarke said the word ‘baby’, Lexa forgot about everything else. A second wave of heat spread across her face and her stomach did an excited flip. “Um...”

“I like Mad Max,” Anya said helpfully. She looked around for other suggestions, but Clarke nodded.

“Sure.”

Lexa offered a shrug and a smile.

The three of them got comfortable on the couch, Anya to one side, Clarke on the other, and Lexa right in the middle with the kettle corn in her lap. Clarke and Anya both munched while she pulled up the movie, and as the opening started, Lexa felt a strange sense of happiness. Now that she’d had a few moments to adjust to Clarke’s affectionate gestures, she was actually... happy? Sure, there had been some embarrassment, but it had been *nice* to hear Clarke call her baby. It had been nice to feel Clarke’s lips on her cheek. And it had been downright exhilarating to feel Clarke’s hand on her rear.

She snuck a peek at Clarke, who was snuggling close to her arm. It was an affectionate pose, something a girlfriend might do, but Lexa noticed that the demon wasn’t invading much of her personal space either. One butt-squeeze seemed to be Clarke’s limit for public displays of affection—or maybe she was just being considerate and didn’t want to push any further without permission.

Lexa didn’t notice her hand was creeping along the back of the couch until the Clarke’s soft hair brushed the inside of her wrist. She froze for a moment, torn with indecision, but eventually, she gave herself permission. She wrapped her arm around Clarke’s shoulder, and her heart hopped on a rocket straight to the moon when Clarke heaved a happy sigh and leaned closer.

“You know,” Clarke muttered a centimeter away from her ear, in a voice far too low for Anya to hear with the movie playing, “for a lawyer, you kind of suck at lying.”

Lexa fought the impulse to shudder. “Practicing law isn’t about lying, Clarke. And I’m not technically a lawyer yet.”

Clarke’s quiet chuckle tickled the corner of Lexa’s jaw. “At least you’ve got the ‘technicalities’ part down. And I haven’t smoked since 1968, just in case you were wondering.”

“Don’t care,” Lexa whispered, “but depending on how long you spent... away... that’s either really impressive or not impressive at all.”

Clarke didn’t answer. She rested her cheek back on Lexa’s shoulder, and Lexa gasped as something thin and warm wrapped around her waist. Her eyes widened when she realized what it was. Clarke’s tail had made a reappearance, and was currently holding her in a light embrace.

Lexa stole a quick peek down her other side to make sure it wasn’t showing where Anya could see, but to her relief, it seemed to be hidden between her back and the couch. She thought about asking Clarke to get rid of it, but decided to trust Clarke’s judgment. Clarke would make it disappear before Anya got a chance to notice.

“Hey,” Clarke muttered, even softer than before—so soft Lexa almost wasn’t sure she was talking.

She gave Clarke a questioning look.

“Thanks, Lexa. This is nice.”

Lexa smiled. “Yeah. Yeah, it is.”



“Okay, I’m exhausted.” Anya yawned, lacing her fingers behind her neck to stretch her shoulders, elbows sticking out to either side. “I’m TA-ing tomorrow, and I need to skim last semester’s lesson plan before bed.”

“Aww,” Clarke said, sticking out her lower lip in a pout. “I mean, it’s not my apartment, but I would’ve been cool with you staying the night.”

“It’s your apartment for now,” Lexa said, giving Clarke a soft smile. The night had passed quicker than she’d thought, and it had been much more relaxing too. Anya and Clarke got on fine—because, apparently, they shared a mutual interest for deconstructing plot holes in movies. It was a habit Lexa couldn’t classify as annoying or endearing, because it was pretty much both at once.

Anya wiggled out from under the afghan she’d wrapped her legs in, folding it over one arm and draping it over the back of the couch. “You two, stop being cute. It disgusts me.”

“I thought we were *friends* ?” Clarke protested, giving Anya a mock-hurt look.

“Not yet,” Anya said. “You’ll know I’m your friend when I drive into the shittiest part of town at 3 AM to pick you up, all because you wanted a gas station breakfast burrito and forgot to lock your car door when you parked.”

Lexa flushed as Clarke’s eyes slid over to her.

“I was sixteen! I’d just gotten my license two weeks before. I was still developing my driving routine checklist.”

Clarke smirked. “Is that why you have a mental checklist for everything?”

“No,” Anya drawled. “She’s had those since she could talk. I have so many stories…”

“Please,” Lexa moaned, “spare me.”

“Anyway,” Anya said to Clarke, “I *will* come back for another casual ‘girlfriend inspection’ sometime soon, okay?”

Clarke leaned in to give Anya a short, half-body hug. “Sounds fun. I’m in.”

Lexa was surprised, but also undeniably pleased when Anya returned the hug—a little awkwardly, perhaps, but not unhappily. Anya wasn't typically a touchy-feely person, and the fact that she'd accepted contact from Clarke at all was, Lexa knew, a silent gesture of approval.

"And you," Anya said, giving Lexa's shoulder a playful nudge, "text me, okay?"

"Okay. Bye."

Anya left with one last wave, and it was only then that Lexa realized she and Clarke were holding hands. They must have started sometime after Clarke hugged Anya, but she couldn't remember. In the course of a few hours, the gesture had begun to feel so natural she hadn't even thought about it.

Clarke seemed to notice her stare, because the demon gave her hand one last squeeze before letting go. "Hey, you did it. And you aren't yellow anymore."

Lexa let out a relieved laugh that was mostly breath. "Couldn't have without you. Thank you."

They were quiet for a while, although the silence wasn't uncomfortable. It wasn't until Lexa realized she was studying Clarke's lips too intently that she cleared her throat and stepped back. "Um... I should grab a shower. Unless you want one first?"

Clarke shrugged. "Go for it. Although I do want out of these clothes now that the Girlfriend Inspector is gone. Pants are the one thing I *don't* miss about being human."

Weeks earlier, if Lexa had watched Clarke shimmy out of her pants right in the living room, she would have looked away immediately. She would have blushed and stammered and begged Clarke to put them back on for modesty's sake. This time, the only reaction that occurred was the blush—one that crawled all the way down her body.

"Just put them in the hamper," Lexa said, her heart picking up speed. It took a small push of willpower to turn away and head for the bathroom.

"Why? I only wore them for a day."

"Because," Lexa said, without glancing over her shoulder, "the right leg's got caramel on it."

While Clarke made a noise of mild distress, Lexa entered the bathroom. She closed the door behind her, shutting herself into her sanctuary, staring at the shower curtain. The pale blue pattern wasn't enough of a distraction. She could still see Clarke's eyes, feel Clarke's lips against her cheek, remember the flash of warmth she'd felt when Clarke had curled up beneath her arm...

Would it be so bad? Not to actually do anything with Clarke, but to pretend?

Her body didn't seem to think so. The heavy twitch the idea caused between her legs and the uncomfortable stickiness of her underwear said the opposite. Lexa ran her thumb over the button of her jeans, hesitating. Then she thought about Clarke's lips. She knew the surprise ass-squeeze had been more obviously sexual, but... Clarke had kissed her in the casual, affectionate way a lover would, and something in her *needed* to pretend it was true, just for a little while.

She closed her eyes and flicked the button open.

She didn't bother stripping completely. It was easier to pull down her zipper and drop her pants and underwear to mid-thigh. The wetness that met her fingers when she cupped between her legs was burning, intense, and she gasped in surprise. She hadn't expected to be so sensitive. But Clarke had been in contact with her all night, holding hands, snuggling against her side, whispering into her neck.

In the safety of Lexa's mind, Anya wasn't on the couch anymore. It was just the two of them, her and Clarke. She imagined Clarke's mouth, the heat of it moving with hers. How would Clarke's pointed teeth feel tugging at her lip? And if Clarke had kissed her mouth instead of her cheek, what would it have tasted like? Warm caramel and salt? The faint flavor of mint toothpaste? Or maybe Clarke tasted like something else entirely, something Lexa couldn't even imagine without testing the flavor for herself?

Lexa wetted her lips, trying not to breathe too loudly. She knew it was all in her head, and there was a real possibility Clarke might hear her through the bathroom door, but now that she'd given in, it was hard not to lose herself in the fantasy. *That* version of Clarke had a hand between her legs, seeking her out with warm, clever fingers. Sparks skittered across Lexa's skin as those fingers found her clit, and she tried to touch herself like Clarke would. Probably not gentle, but slow and teasing—looking up into her eyes, studying her reactions, seeking out each weak point and exploiting it.

And what if Clarke's mouth moved lower too? Kissing down her body, leaving soft pink marks over her skin, swirling a tongue around the sensitive point of her hipbone until Lexa grabbed her horns and...

A quiet moan escaped from between Lexa's trembling lips as she eased two fingers inside herself. What would it feel like for Clarke to push inside her? Or... or for her to slide inside of Clarke?

The scene shifted, and Lexa bucked into her own hand as the Clarke of her imagination reappeared beneath her, clinging to her back, clutching tight around her fingers. She knew Clarke would be hot, tight, smooth, but what sounds would she make? Low sighs of satisfaction? Quiet, needy whimpers? Or honest to goodness shouts? Maybe even shouting her name. Maybe...

Lexa tensed. The image in her mind was painfully clear: Clarke beneath her, arching in ecstasy, spine and neck one graceful curve, every muscle quivering. Golden hair splayed across the pillows, eyes scrunched up, her kiss-swollen mouth open wide so she could say—

"Clarke," Lexa rasped, jerking into the heel of her hand. The slight contact against her clit was enough. She clenched around her own fingers, lost in hopes and dreams where Clarke was doing the same, coming for her and because of her, pouring heat into her hand and muttering tender words into her shoulder.

"Lexa. I love you."

Leaving that world, the world where Clarke loved her, was painful. Lexa wanted to linger there, but as her ripples became aftershocks, it slipped away through her fingers. She opened her eyes again, staring at the shower curtain, disappointed that it wasn't the same shade of blue as Clarke's eyes, and keenly aware of the uncomfortable stickiness between her legs... as well as a growing feeling of hollowness.

Lexa bit her lip, blinking back tears. It wasn't okay to keep pretending. Imagining Clarke as her girlfriend had felt way too right—something she'd always hoped for in secret, but never thought she'd have. Now, the opportunity was right in front of her, almost real enough to imagine, close enough to touch... and she couldn't do anything about it. Even though Clarke seemed to return her feelings—had practically come out and said it—the reality was simple. Clarke still technically "belonged" to her, and not in the way Lexa wanted at all.

She removed her hand and turned the shower on cold. It would be easier if the ache was just between her legs instead of a hole in the middle of her chest.



Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

Double updates today! I promised you a kiss, so plow on ahead to Chapter 10 once you're done this one.

Thanks to @alphacommander for the absolutely fantastic art. Please follow her! And I'm @raedmagdon on tumblr, as always.

“Lexa? Hey, Lexa.”

Lexa jerked her head around, knees jumping beneath her desk. Her heart leapt for a second, but it was only Monty, holding a piece of lined notebook paper out toward her. She exhaled in relief. Sometimes, getting startled by anything and everything really sucked—especially in the middle of class.

“Sorry,” Monty whispered. His eyes flicked toward the front of the room, but luckily, their philosophy professor was busy fiddling with the PowerPoint projector. “I think you dropped this.”

Lexa’s brow furrowed as she took the paper. She unfolded it, then rolled her eyes. ‘Lexa is a fart’ was written in big bubbly letters—complete with a cartoon drawing of her. In addition to the expected mushroom cloud in the background, Clarke had used her “artistic license” to add a monocle and a penciled in mustache.

“Hey,” Raven hissed from beside Monty, leaning forward to peer over Lexa’s shoulder. “Is Clarke an art major or something? That’s good.”

Since it was too late to hide the drawing, Lexa shot Raven a look of bemused disbelief. “If she was, would she waste her time on this?”

“Hey, if I was an artist, that’s what I’d draw,” Raven said.

“Maybe it has hidden symbolism,” Octavia snickered, trying and failing to suppress a grin. “You’re all making fun of it, but it could be really deep.”

“No,” Bellamy said. “I think Clarke is just trying to tell us Lexa is a fart.”

The entire row cracked up as quietly as possible. After a moment, Lexa chuckled along with them. It was pretty funny, in a stupid sort of way. “The mustache is a cliché,” she said, studying the drawing again. “If she really wanted to be original, she should’ve gone with sideburns and a unibrow.”

“So you’re an art critic now?” Bellamy asked, his mouth pulling into a wry smirk.

Lexa shrugged. “In the literal sense, if you consider this ‘art’, and I’m critiquing it...”

“Okay, everyone,” the professor said, clearing his throat to get the room’s attention. “I’ve got it working again. Let’s continue with the presentation.”

After a few murmurings of discontent, the students quieted down. The class didn’t fall into silence, however, before Raven whispered, “Tell Clarke to do me next,” behind Lexa’s head, and Octavia snorted loudly at the potential double meaning.

Lexa gave them a friendly roll of her eyes before returning to her laptop. Focusing on her notes proved more difficult than usual. Her eyes kept returning to the drawing, which was partially hidden beneath her forearm. Yes, it was stupid and immature, but she found it kind of cute that Clarke had drawn her—and slipped it into her backpack, too. Even during the school day when they were separated, Clarke had found a way to both make her laugh and dissolve some of the tension between them.

That tension wasn’t Clarke’s fault. Lexa knew she was the one with the complicated emotions—running hot one minute, cold the next. The past two days had been awkward despite her best efforts. Whenever she looked at Clarke, she remembered the cheek kiss... how it had felt to wrap her arms around Clarke’s shoulder...

She shook herself before she got lost in thought. Touching herself definitely hadn't been a good idea. There was no going back after an act like that, and even though she'd made a nightly habit of it since Anya's visit—always in the shower, trying her best to be quick and quiet—guilt sat heavy in her stomach. Her fantasies were just that. Fantasies. But it frightened her how much she wanted them to become reality, especially since Clarke seemed to want the same thing.

Lexa didn't realize the lecture was over until she heard the shuffling of feet and paper around her. She closed her laptop, resigning herself to the fact that most of her notes wouldn't make sense. Her mood lifted a little when she noticed Raven, Octavia, Bellamy, and Monty lingering in the row behind her.

"Hey, Lexa, wanna grab coffee with us?" Raven asked with a friendly grin.

Lexa blinked in owlish surprise. "Without Clarke?"

"Clarke isn't here today, is she?" Octavia asked—not sarcastically, but with genuine confusion.

It was only then that Lexa realized the significance of the invitation. Clarke had been her 'in' with this group, but they were genuinely asking her to hang out. She smiled. It was nice to be included in group activities for a change, even if she'd had to wait two decades longer than most people.

"Sure," she said, zipping up her bag and hoisting it onto her shoulder.

* * *

Lexa sat with her hands wrapped around a warm cup of tea, smiling as she soaked in the atmosphere. This was... nice. It felt nice to be part of a group, clustered around an uncomfortably small table with mismatched chairs at the campus café. A little weird, sure, but Monty, Raven, Octavia, and Bellamy didn't seem to notice her awkwardness. They engaged with her when she spoke, but weren't upset when she lapsed into moments of silence. The four of them seemed content simply to exist in her presence while allowing her to exist in theirs.

She let her eyes drift shut for a second, inhaling the scent of roasted coffee. *I wish I'd known it could be like this. Maybe I would have tried socializing sooner.* But really, that was a generous thought. She doubted she would have spoken to her classmates at all, or accepted an invitation like this, if Clarke hadn't laid the groundwork over the past few weeks. *I owe her a thank you, for impressing Anya and practically making my friends for me. Maybe that's enough of a favor for her to earn her*

"Octavia? Earth to Octavia!"

Lexa opened her eyes again. Raven, Monty, and Bellamy were all staring at Octavia, who seemed to be spacing out as well.

"Octavia, I swear to god," Raven grumbled, nudging Octavia's shoulder with hers.

Octavia jerked in surprise. "What?" she whined, giving Raven a sour look.

"You're staring at the hunky barista again. Get yourself another drink, because you're still way too thirsty."

"Am not!"

"Thirsty," Raven repeated, in a tone that suggested further arguments would be useless.

"Gross," Bellamy said, pulling a mildly disgusted face. "I don't need to know when my baby sister is checking someone out."

"I didn't bring it up!"

Lexa snuck a glance over at the counter. The line had thinned enough for her to see the brown-smocked employees, and while the girl at the register didn't look familiar, she recognized the man making drinks a few feet away. "Oh, you mean Lincoln?"

Octavia leaned forward over the table with wide eyes. "Wait, you know him?"

"Yes. He's a law student too, one year behind me."

A wide grin spread across Octavia's face. "A coffee-making law student. That's my kind of guy."

“What was that about not being thirsty?” Raven said.

Other than shooting her a reproachful look, Octavia ignored her. “Lexa, I need a wingwoman. What does he like? I want to give him things.”

“He’s at work,” Monty reminded her. “Don’t be that customer, Octavia.”

“I know,” Octavia said. “That’s why my good buddy Lexa is going to chat him up for me while he’s off the clock.”

“I’m what?” Lexa couldn’t suppress a snort. Her face suddenly felt warmer despite the café’s air conditioning. “You do know I’m a lesbian, right?”

“I’m not asking you to screw him,” Octavia said. “I just want you to introduce me.”

“That’s not what your request implied.”

Octavia let out an annoyed huff of air while the rest of the table laughed at her expense.

“What’s this guy like, anyway?” Bellamy asked.

“Nice, as far as I know,” Lexa said. “He’s quiet. Does well on his exams.”

Bellamy made a small grunt of satisfaction, which only annoyed Octavia further. “Just for that, I’m going to date a guy with face tattoos and a shitty motorcycle who lives in his mom’s basement. I’ll do it out of spite—don’t think I won’t, Bel.”

While Raven and Monty laughed again, this time at Bellamy’s expense, Lexa felt a prickle race up along her spine. She turned, not fully understanding why, and caught a glimpse of a familiar figure entering through the door. Clarke. Lexa’s mouth went dry.

Clarke was wearing one of her t-shirts, which was far too tight around the chest, and a pair of shorts that were also much too small. Lexa had never been the type to notice or analyze outfits on anyone other than herself, but with Clarke, she couldn’t help it. Sometimes it seemed like Clarke stole her clothes on purpose just to torment her.

From across the café, Clarke’s eyes met hers. Before Lexa could adjust her leering to a more polite stare of acknowledgment, Clarke raised a hand and waved, making a beeline for their table. “Hey,” she said when she arrived, placing both hands on Lexa’s shoulders from behind. “What’s happening?”

A chorus of ‘Hey, Clarke’s came from around the table.

Lexa swallowed around her tongue. “Hello Clarke.” Only after replying did she realize that, although her heart had picked up speed, her shoulders hadn’t stiffened at Clarke’s touch.

“What kind of lame hello is that? C’mon.” Clarke leaned forward over Lexa’s shoulder, presenting her cheek. “Gimme some.”

The debate in Lexa’s mind was swift, but furious. She both wanted and didn’t want to kiss Clarke’s cheek, for the same reasons she always agonized over, but since Clarke was asking and people were staring, she gave in and pecked the side of Clarke’s face.

“Whoa,” Raven chuckled, “easy on the PDA, you two.”

“Fuck off,” Clarke said, swiping a chair from another table and plopping down. “So why does Lexa look like someone asked her to strip naked and run around the quad?”

“I asked her to be my wingwoman,” Octavia said. “You know, for the cute guy behind the counter.”

Clarke sat up a little straighter in her seat and craned her neck. “Hmm. Yeah, he’s hot. I’d let that happen if I was single.” At the same time, she scooted her chair closer to Lexa’s and reached across the table for her hand.

Lexa barely even considered Clarke’s statement. Clarke’s touch was far too distracting, and any jealousy she felt evaporated. *Wait, do I even have a right to be jealous?*

“Right?” Octavia said. “Tell Lexa she has to introduce us. Otherwise I’ll just be a gross customer hitting on a hot barista. She’s my in!”

Even though she knew Octavia was talking about her, Lexa found it difficult to pay attention. Clarke's thumb had started stroking her hand, and the contact was both soothing and exhilarating. "Sure," she mumbled, "if you meet me after class one day, I could—"

"Thank you," Octavia said with a sigh of relief. "I owe you one."

"I'm holding you responsible if he turns out to be a douche," Bellamy grumbled.

"He's not," Clarke said, glancing over at the counter again.

Bellamy looked at her in surprise. "How do you know?"

"Lexa's mentioned him," Clarke said, although Lexa knew she most definitely hadn't. However, she nodded in agreement when Bellamy looked at her for confirmation.

"See?" Octavia said. "He's not a douche."

"I hope you have higher dating standards than 'not a douche'," Lexa said.

"Abs," Monty said with a knowing smirk. Raven snorted beside him, almost tipping her drink.

"I'm with her," Clarke said to Monty. "Who doesn't like abs? I mean, besides Lexa."

It was Lexa's turn to cough around a mouthful of tea. In the glossy surface of the table, her reflection looked fire engine red.

"What?" Clarke said. "Like it's a secret? You're dating me."

Raven waggled her eyebrows. "More cushion for the pushin'?"

"More junk in the trunk," Monty chimed in.

They both looked at Lexa, who found that her throat had suddenly closed up.

Thankfully, Clarke pulled Lexa out of danger just as quickly as she'd shoved her into it. "Okay, Lexa's reached her teasing limit. Actually, we need to get going. She's taking me on a romantic getaway this weekend."

Lexa managed to keep her face neutral, but her stomach flipped over itself. This was the first she'd heard about any kind of getaway. *What the hell is Clarke dragging me into this time? Please let it not be a dumb highway attraction called the World's Largest Something. Oh god, what if it's skydiving? Or bungee jumping, or parasailing, or anything else with the potential to make me throw up.*

"Where to?" Bellamy asked.

"Road trip," Clarke said. She tugged Lexa's hand, pulling her out of her chair. "You ready to go, babe? I don't want to make you bail on your friends, but we're losing daylight."

"Sure," Lexa said, even though she wasn't sure of anything.

"Great. Let's beat feet." Clarke waved goodbye to the table, then began tugging Lexa in the direction of the door.

"Thanks for inviting me," Lexa called back over her shoulder.

"Thanks for hanging out," Monty said.

"Don't forget about Lincoln!" Octavia added.

"I won't." Lexa allowed Clarke to pull her out of the café, squinting as the late afternoon sunlight slanted into her eyes. "So, where are we actually going?" she asked, blinking to adjust her vision.

"We are actually going on a road trip," Clarke said. "I mean, unless you don't want to. But I want you to, and if I don't take you now, I might chicken out."

Lexa looked at Clarke's face. Clarke was wearing an expression she hadn't seen often before, or maybe at all—one that Lexa finally managed to place as uncertainty. She'd never seen Clarke act uncertain about anything. "I'll go anywhere with you," Lexa said, before she realized just how corny that sounded. "I mean, if you need to take me somewhere, I'm in."

Clarke's smile returned, weaker than it had been before, but genuine. "Really?"

Lexa's heart filled up with sunshine. "Of course. Do we need a car, or—"

"We can take the bus," Clarke said. "It'll be a couple hours, though. We won't get back until late."

"I don't mind. I'll do homework."

"Lexa..." Clarke hesitated, as if she wanted to say something but wasn't certain she should. "Thanks."

The extra weight at the end of the word was obvious.

Lexa gave Clarke's hand a squeeze. "You don't need to thank me. Let's go to the bus stop."



Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

Thank you to @alphacommander for the stunning kiss. She even colored it! Please go to her blog and follow her (and share all her fantastic Clexa art.

I'm @raedmagdon as well. :D

Instead of doing homework, Lexa spent most of the bus ride with Clarke's head in her lap. Something about the motion of buses seemed to put Clarke to sleep, Lexa had learned, which was probably why Clarke was more well-behaved on the bus than anywhere else. She spent most of the two hour ride stroking Clarke's hair, grateful they'd chosen seats in the back row. Even if they were near the toilet, it meant they had some privacy.

While Clarke snored lightly into one of her thighs, Lexa alternated between staring at her and gazing out the window. The telephone poles whipped by in a hypnotic rhythm, and as they headed away from the coast, more trees popped up. Green trees, blue sky. A world in vivid color. And she was getting to see it because, yet again, Clarke had dragged her out of her comfort zone. For once, she wasn't spending Friday night shoving takeout into her face, hunched over textbooks or scrolling through transcripts on her computer. It felt... nice, like the café had felt nice.

The bus came to a stop before Lexa expected. She checked her phone, surprised to see that several hours had flown by already. The motion disturbed Clarke, who made a few discontented smacking sounds before cracking a bleary eye open. "We there yet?"

"Yes."

Clarke yawned, lifting her head off Lexa's lap. "Okay. Let's go."

The bus stop outside was unusually small. There was only a cheap plastic awning and a lone fare machine, both of which looked like they hadn't been wiped down in a while. To either side were buildings, but aside from a general store and what seemed to be a brick school building, they were mostly residential.

"Clarke?" Lexa asked, looking around in surprise. She hadn't come here with too many expectations, but this wasn't what she'd been picturing. Even so, it didn't take her long to put the pieces together. "This is your hometown, isn't it?"

"Not exactly. It's complicated. Walk with me." Clarke started off down the sidewalk, stepping over grass-filled cracks between the squares of pavement.

Lexa took a few brisk steps to catch up. They walked a couple of blocks, past more houses and a post office, but Clarke didn't speak the whole time. It was an abrupt departure from her usual behavior, and for once, Lexa didn't feel comfortable with silence.

Finally, Clarke came to a stop in front of a white building with paneled walls. It wasn't large, only two stories, and the sign outside read: *Ark of the Covenant Community Church*. Lexa waited a while, glancing between the church and Clarke. "Are you allowed to go in?"

Clarke gave a soft laugh. "Yeah, I can go in. I just don't want to."

"You don't have to," Lexa said. "We can turn around."

Clarke shook her head. "No... no, I need to. And I need for you to come with me. Just hold my hand."

Lexa took Clarke's hand in hers, a little surprised to feel it trembling. "If you're sure..."

After a deep breath, Clarke headed forward, not up the stairs to the church itself, but to a fenced-in field around back. The gate was open, and Lexa's stomach sank when she realized where they were. It was a cemetery, small but neatly maintained. Someone had taken care to keep the grass trimmed and the plaques clear of leaves.

Clarke led Lexa up through the rows, taking care to follow the gridwork. As the field stretched back, the graves became a little more haphazard. Though they were clean as well, they also looked older, and there were fewer fresh flowers on top of them. After a while, Clarke came to a stop near the back right corner, standing in front of one plaque in particular.

Lexa bent her head to read.

Jacob Griffin

1923 - 1993

Beloved husband and father

Wherever he met a stranger, there he left a friend.

Lexa stood there looking at the grave a long while, holding Clarke's hand. Soon, her throat started to burn and her eyes began to water. She knew it was stupid. This was about Clarke, not her. But knowing Clarke was in pain made her hurt too. "Your last name's Griffin, isn't it?"

"Was," Clarke said in a tight voice.

Lexa looked at the dates again. "Your dad?"

"Yeah." Clarke withdrew her hand, folding her arms across her chest and staring at the grass. "I loved him, you know? Mom and I, sometimes we'd fight, but Dad was always in my corner."

"I'm sorry, Clarke."

"Don't need a sorry. I bought him an extra twenty five years with Mom. That was... is... enough."

Clarke lapsed into silence for a while longer, while Lexa tried to decide what to do. She had a hundred questions, but this didn't feel like the time or place to ask them. Eventually, she only asked one: "You look cold. Want my jacket?"

"I don't get cold. Which is why shorts in autumn." She gestured at her bare legs.

"Do you want it anyway?"

Clarke shrugged. "Sure."

Lexa pulled it off and passed it over. Clarke draped it over her shoulders without putting her arms through the sleeves, letting them hang down her front instead.

"He had lung cancer," Clarke said at last. "They said it was probably asbestos exposure. He did a stint as an engineer on a Gato-class submarine right before I was born. Came home, he and Mom had me... then twenty one years later..." She sighed, looking at the gravestone. "Cancer was different back then. No one wanted to say the word, not even the doctors. They danced around it because they knew, we all knew, it was basically a death sentence."

"So your contract..."

Clarke let out a hollow laugh. "Was so the bastards would cure his cancer."

"The bastards?"

"Lawyers. Not all of them are as cute as you. At least, not the ones from Sheol. Demon realm," she added, noticing Lexa's confused look. "So, yeah. That bracelet of yours? Mine. My Dad gave it to me. Once I was bound to it, they chucked it into the universe and waited for a bite. Your Nan happened to find it."

A small smirk spread across Clarke's face. "They weren't happy about that. Demons get sent out into the world to make more demons, but Becca wasn't interested. Instead of fulfilling some wish that required a demon bargain, I helped her snag her husband. The guy fell head over heels for her on his own, so I did her a service without roping her into a contract. Good thing. Wishing for love never goes well."

"And?" Lexa asked. "What happened after that?"

"I bummed around with Becca for a few years until the lawyers came and said I had to move on to my next assignment. So back in the bracelet I went. Or to limbo, I guess. I don't remember any of it, there's just a gap. But I do know Becca must have

kept that bracelet safe instead of losing it so it could move on to someone else... because I ended up with you.” Clarke looked up, laughing even as her eyes glistened with tears. “And the lawyers must be pissed, because you haven’t wished for anything either. My conversion average is now zero for two.”

Lexa turned toward Clarke without thinking about it. She hesitated, but only long enough to make sure Clarke wouldn’t pull away before drawing her in for a hug. “I don’t want anything from you, Clarke,” she whispered against Clarke’s hair. “No wishes, no services. You can even sabotage opportunities for me if it means you get to stay.”

Clarke chuckled tearfully into her shoulder, until Lexa felt a damp spot form on the fabric of her shirt. “It can’t last, Lexa,” Clarke said in a muffled voice. “They won’t let it. We’ll have a few years, maybe, but then the lawyers will come and put me back in the bracelet. And even if you found a way to keep me, I won’t get old. You’ll live your life while I stay the same. And eventually, you’ll die.”

Determination gathered in Lexa’s chest. “So we find a way to void your contract. Nothing’s changed, Clarke. You’re my... friend. I’m not going to let someone take you away if you don’t want to go.”

Clarke’s head lifted from her shoulder. “Your friend?”

Something in Clarke’s watering eyes made Lexa’s heart clench. She felt sad and scared and happy and dizzy all at once, and words failed her. She was Clarke’s friend. That had never been in doubt. But she wanted to be more. So much more.

But can I? It’s not just about consent. It’s about more than that now. She’s trusted me with so much, and I... I love her. I want to help her. And I still don’t know how.

“Clarke,” Lexa whispered, her voice breaking on that one word. She moved one of her hands up to sweep Clarke’s blonde hair behind her ear. “I’ll be whatever you want me to be. Whatever you need. You get to decide. Just tell me and I’ll—”

“Lexa,” Clarke said, laughing through a fresh round of tears. “Kiss me.”

They both leaned forward at the same time. Their noses bumped, and then Lexa felt Clarke’s lips brush hers. Clarke’s mouth was warm, soft, and Lexa couldn’t stop the low groan that built in her throat. It felt like she’d been waiting for this forever, and now she didn’t want it to end. Not ever.





When the two of them did break apart for breath, it was only for a split second. Lexa chased Clarke's lips again, and Clarke's mouth opened willingly against hers. The first brush of Clarke's tongue made Lexa shudder, and she swept her own along Clarke's bottom lip, hoping that wouldn't be too bold. It wasn't, because Clarke's arms draped around her neck, and Lexa felt a warm glow in her chest as Clarke's body pressed closer to hers.

That glow moved down to her stomach, then even further, settling low between her hips. She was so lost in Clarke's lips that she didn't notice at first, but she caught herself trying to press her hips forward. She broke away, reluctant to stop, but certain that this wasn't the right place for anything more than a kiss.

"Lexa?" Clarke murmured, gazing at her with a mixture of worry and hope.

"It's okay," Lexa said, sweeping her thumb across the drying tear tracks on Clarke's cheek. "I'm okay if you are. I just don't want to—"

A smile broke across Clarke's face. "You drive me crazy, you know that? Do you have any idea how long I've wanted you to kiss me?"

"Not longer than I've wanted to kiss you," Lexa confessed.

"I doubt that." Clarke kissed her one more time, soft and sweet. "You know," she whispered, their lips still close, "it's getting late..."

Lexa finally noticed the darkening sky. She'd been so distracted that she hadn't realized the sun was setting. "Sorry. Did you want to head back? We can probably still catch a bus."

"No." Clarke took Lexa's hand, threading their fingers together. "Actually, I was thinking we could stay the night."

The meaning of her words was clear. Clarke was asking for more, and Lexa found herself powerless to say no.
She asked you to kiss her,

she reminded herself.

She's asking you to spend the night with her too. And she brought you here. She didn't have to do that. It was her choice.

"Clarke..."

"Please, Lexa." Clarke's other hand cupped the back of Lexa's neck, sending warmth down her spine. "I know you want this. Is it that hard to believe I want it, too?"

"Yes, Clarke. I was going to say yes."

Clarke laughed—a genuine laugh this time. "Really? And here I thought I was going to have to break out the 'if you say no, you're still making a decision for me' argument."

Lexa couldn't resist leaning in to kiss Clarke's smiling mouth one more time. "You should be a lawyer. The human kind."

"Lexa," Clarke murmured, gazing into her eyes, "you make me feel more human than I've felt in a really long time."

Chapter 11

It was past sunset by the time Lexa and Clarke arrived at a suitable motel. The vacancy sign was missing a letter and there was a strip of duct tape beneath one of the windows, but Lexa wasn't in the mood to be picky. Clarke's hand burned in hers, and the excitement fluttering in her belly hadn't died down since their kiss.

Their kiss. Clarke had *kissed* her. Maybe it was her imagination, but Lexa could still taste Clarke's lips. It was a flavor she couldn't quite describe, but one she knew she would never forget. Her mouth watered for more as the two of them walked up the cement steps together and entered the lobby.

The man behind the counter wasn't all that interested in them, or in the fact that they were holding hands. He checked them in with an air of boredom, for which Lexa was grateful. Each passing moment made her tremble more, because it was a moment closer to being alone with Clarke. She wasn't sure what would happen—she still had plenty of fears and doubts—but she also desperately wanted to find out.

As if Clarke could sense her storm of emotions, the hand clasping hers gave a reassuring squeeze as Lexa fumbled for her credit card. Clarke's thumb passed gently over her knuckles in soothing strokes, and Lexa had to take a deep breath. She signed the receipt clumsily, taking the small envelope with their key cards.

"Room twelve," the man behind the desk said, nodding toward the hallway. "No breakfast, but there's a vending machine by the back door."

"That's fine," Clarke said, with a smile that made Lexa's heart thud out of rhythm. "I'm sure we'll find something to eat."

For once, Lexa wasn't embarrassed by the public flirting. The only thing she felt as Clarke dragged her down the hallway was hope.

Their room wasn't much to look at. The plastic golden '2' in '12' on the door was tilted a few degrees to the left, and Lexa had to jiggle the handle a bit even after the keycard slot flashed green. The furniture was simple: a lumpy armchair, a smallish entertainment system, and queen sized bed with bleached white sheets and a pale blue comforter. There was a bathroom to the left of the door—stocked with cheap toilet paper, Lexa noted—and the whole place smelled like lingering cleaning supplies.

Clarke didn't seem to care. She kicked off her sandals and flopped onto the mattress, lacing her fingers behind her head. "Miss your bed," she sighed, gazing up at the ceiling. "But this'll do."

Lexa wasn't sure what she'd expected to happen—another passionate kiss, maybe?—but this wasn't it. Clarke seemed so calm and relaxed, exactly the opposite of how she felt. "For the night?"

Clarke rolled onto her side, and Lexa choked on her tongue. Clarke's horns had reappeared on top of her head, and her tail was draped over her thigh, its tip flicking lazily against her leg. "For whatever you want."

Lexa swallowed. So, she hadn't misinterpreted things. This wasn't some crazy fever dream or a huge misunderstanding. Clarke was offering sex—no, sex *and* feelings of some kind. She opened her mouth, preparing to say the words that had plagued her every day since Clarke had emerged from her grandmother's bracelet: "*You don't have to do anything for me.*"

At the last moment, she stopped herself.

What if Clarke wants to do this with me? That was what Clarke had already told her more than once. That was why Clarke had brought her here. That was why Clarke had kissed her. If she refused to take Clarke's 'yes' as an answer, wasn't that still her making Clarke's decisions? Taking away her power of choice?

The thought of rejecting the trust Clarke had placed in her made Lexa's heart ache. She couldn't do it. She would just have to believe in the desire she could see shining in Clarke's beautiful blue eyes. She took another cautious step toward the bed—toward Clarke.

"If I do something you're not comfortable with, tell me?"

Clarke smiled. It wasn't a seductive smirk, or even an amused grin at Lexa's expense. It was simply a genuine smile, and its gentle warmth made an answering heat spread across Lexa's skin. "I will. If I do something *you're* not comfortable with..."

"I'll tell you," Lexa said, in a voice made raspy by nerves. But the longer she looked at Clarke, the less nervous she felt. Her

uncertainty became something sharper and hungrier as Clarke shifted up onto her knees, crossing her arms across her front to strip the shirt she'd borrowed up and over her head.

The sight of Clarke without it, full breasts overflowing from the cups of her bra, wasn't new to Lexa. Beautiful, yes, but she'd seen it several times before. She'd seen more, in fact, thanks to Clarke's habit of walking around the apartment without clothes. Still, it stole her breath. There was something different about it now, knowing that Clarke wasn't just taking her clothes off for comfort. Clarke was stripping for her.

"Hey, Lexa?"

Lexa blinked, tearing her eyes away from Clarke's breasts. She could just see Clarke's nipples poking out through the thin black fabric. "Hmm?"

Clarke patted the mattress. "C'mere."

It was an invitation Lexa couldn't turn down. She toed off her shoes and climbed onto the bed beside Clarke. For a moment she worried she might not know what to do, but being near Clarke made it easy. Clarke leaned toward her for a kiss, and she leaned in too. Their mouths met with soft, wet heat.

Kissing Clarke again felt just like the first time. Maybe even better, since no one was crying. That kiss had been hesitant and bittersweet, but this one was joyful. She was kissing Clarke. She was actually kissing Clarke. It still seemed unbelievable, but the taste of Clarke's mouth and the ticklish sensation of the demon's fingers sifting through her hair proved it was real.

Soon, Lexa found herself running her hands along Clarke's bare sides while Clarke sucked her bottom lip. Clarke's teeth were sharp, but in the best way possible, and Lexa hissed as the points dug in enough for her to feel them. They didn't break the skin, but those little pricks of pain, followed by the soothing swipe of Clarke's tongue, sent tingles racing up and down her spine.

Clarke noticed. "Is this okay?" she muttered into Lexa's mouth without really pulling away.

Lexa moaned in response. She claimed Clarke's lips again, letting her own tongue slip forward to gather more of Clarke's flavor. The deeper they kissed, the more she burned—a simmering heat that started in her mouth, but traveled throughout her body with each rapid beat of her heart. Most of it pooled between her legs, and she shifted as wetness soaked through her underwear.

Clothes were becoming an annoyance. Lexa wanted to tear hers off almost as badly as she wanted to rip away Clarke's. It seemed like Clarke had the same idea, because she took both of Lexa's hands and guided them around her waist, placing them over the clasp to her bra. "Go ahead," she whispered, breaking away from Lexa's lips to gaze into her eyes. "I want you to."

Lexa sipped shallow breaths as she fumbled with the hooks. She was no stranger to bras, but her fingers were clumsier than usual. Eventually she managed to unfasten the clasp, only for a whimper to break in her throat. Clarke's breasts were beyond perfect, full and firm and round, capped with pretty pink nipples that pleaded to be sucked. Lexa hesitated only long enough for Clarke to give a slight nod before filling her hands with them, testing their weight with a gentle squeeze.

She wasn't quite sure how she transitioned from holding Clarke's breasts to kneading them, but she didn't care. The sounds Clarke made when she circled the tips with her thumbs were intoxicating, and Lexa couldn't get enough. It didn't matter that she wasn't sure what she was doing, that she barely had any experience aside from a few undergrad flings. Clarke's moans and sighs told her every time she did something right, and she'd always been a fast learner.

Lexa was surprised when Clarke swung a leg over her thighs and straddled her lap, but she didn't mind the change in position. It brought Clarke's breasts in line with her face, close enough for her to draw a puffy nipple into her mouth. Clarke arched on top of her as she laved it with her tongue, fisting her hair without pulling it, muttering words that made Lexa feel lighter than air.

"That feels so good. Lex, baby, please... please keep going."

The image you are
requesting does not exist
or is no longer available.

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Hearing Clarke beg for her was so much better than Lexa could have imagined. It was yet more proof that Clarke wanted this, that they were on equal footing, giving themselves to each other by choice. She sucked Clarke's nipple harder, nibbling gently with her teeth before kissing her way across to the other side.

She might have been content to linger that way forever if Clarke's hips hadn't canted forward. The slight scrape of fabric against her stomach drew Lexa's attention downward, and she broke away from Clarke's breast, her breath hitching as she realized what was happening. Clarke was rubbing against her. Even through two layers of clothing, Lexa could feel heat radiating from between Clarke's legs.

Gathering her courage, she slid her hands down to Clarke's hips and asked, "Can I?"

Clarke leaned down, resting their foreheads together. "Please do. But take off your shirt too? I'm feeling kinda exposed here."

Lexa laughed. "You? Feeling exposed?"

"Okay," Clarke snorted, "I know how it sounds. But I want to see you. Is that okay?"

The request made butterflies erupt in Lexa's stomach. As nervous as she was, she wanted to please Clarke. If they were going to do this, she wanted to be a full participant. She stripped her shirt and sports bra up and over her head, popping out to see that Clarke was shimmying out of her shorts. All that remained was a pair of bikini cut underwear with a sprinkled donut pattern on them—and a big damp spot in the middle.

“Where did you even get those panties?” Lexa asked, grinning bemusedly.

Clarke smirked. “I have my ways.”

“The dollar store near my apartment?”

“The dollar store near your apartment.”

Clarke took Lexa’s hand in hers, dragging it down along her belly and guiding it under the elastic waistband. “If you don’t like ‘em... why don’t you take ‘em off?”

Lexa’s eyes widened. Clarke had guided her fingers straight into a pool of silken wetness. Slippery heat spread all over her fingertips, and she rubbed without thinking, searching out sensitive spots. Clarke bit her lip, the points of her cheeks flushing. “Lexa... Lex, keep going.”

There was nothing Lexa wanted more. She teased Clarke’s outer lips first, feeling the way they petaled open for her, before dipping into the heat between them. Clarke’s entrance pulsed the second she brushed over it, but Lexa didn’t push inside. Not yet. She wanted to savor this, to make it last. She stroked upwards instead, feeling for Clarke’s clit, and groaned when she found it. The stiff bud was swollen under its hood, slick with Clarke’s need.

Clarke went rigid the moment Lexa touched it. Her hips jerked forward and her eyes rolled back in her head. The motion of her breasts jutting forward reminded Lexa how close they were to her mouth, and she took Clarke’s right nipple back between her lips, swirling her tongue around it as she did the same with her fingers below.

This has to be heaven, Lexa thought. Clarke’s on top of me. Wet for me. Letting me feel her. Oh god, what did I do to deserve this? But some part of her was certain she did deserve it. Touching Clarke—making love to her, maybe? Yes, definitely making love to her—felt more right than she could have imagined.

Clarke moaned above her, hips rolling faster, voice throaty with urgency. “Lex... baby, sweetheart, please. Inside. Want you inside.”

Lexa shuddered. She hadn’t expected Clarke to be so explicit, but she was grateful for instructions. Later, there would be time to tease, to pick and choose what she did so Clarke could enjoy the surprise, but right now, she just wanted to make the beautiful woman above her feel good. She let Clarke’s nipple go with a pop and looked up at her, searching for permission. Her eyes asked, *Are you sure?*

Clarke didn’t ask again. Instead, she repositioned herself over Lexa’s fingers and sank down, clenching as they slipped inside.

For a moment, Lexa didn’t move. She couldn’t. The sensations were overwhelming. Clarke’s walls were the tightest, hottest, smoothest thing she had ever touched. Her insides felt like rippling silk, but when Lexa gave her fingers an exploratory push, she realized the texture wasn’t as smooth as she’d thought. Clarke was full of soft, spongy ridges, and whenever she pressed into them, Clarke’s hips jerked above hers.

“Yes,” Clarke panted, tilting her pelvis to rub her clit against the heel of Lexa’s hand. “Just like that. Please keep doing that.”

Lexa couldn’t see exactly what she was doing through Clarke’s ruined underwear, but she could definitely feel it. Still, she wanted to look. She wanted to watch her fingers disappear into Clarke’s body, to steal an image that she could keep in her mind forever. She used her other hand to tug Clarke’s panties down to mid-thigh, revealing where her hand was cupped at the join of Clarke’s legs.

The sight of her fingers buried deep within Clarke was more beautiful than she could have imagined. Clear, glittering strands of Clarke’s arousal coated her hand, and Clarke’s lips had blossomed open around her knuckles like the pink petals of a flower. When Lexa curled her fingers, the muscles in Clarke’s belly jumped, and the slight jiggle in her flexing thighs only made her movements more entrancing.

Lexa wrapped her free arm around Clarke’s waist, supporting her from behind, and then went to work. She stroked slowly at first, mostly in and out, and while her new lover seemed to like that, Lexa noticed Clarke’s responses increase when she angled her fingers forward. She went from thrusting to curling, in awe of the way Clarke’s front wall swelled every time her fingertips pressed into it.

“Baby,” Clarke murmured, breathing fast, eyes half-lidded. “Lexa, yes, don’t stop.”

Lexa could have listened to her name, or any endearment at all, fall from Clarke’s lips thousands of times without tiring of it. She lowered her lips to Clarke’s neck, kissing her collarbone and hooking her fingers a little harder. Clarke’s muscles

squeezed around her, and Lexa rejoiced in the stirring flutters. She didn't know for sure, but she had a suspicion Clarke was close to coming.

"Oh, Lexa—please, Lex, *harder*."

Lexa prepared to pump harder, but she didn't have to. Clarke's tail whipped between them, winding around her wrist and pulling with a surprising amount of strength. The insistent tugging gave Lexa some extra leverage, and she used it to her advantage. She drove into Clarke harder, but still with the utmost care, making sure to hit the spot she'd found every time.

When Lexa angled her hand so the bottom brushed along Clarke's clit, Clarke went rigid above her. She screamed, a needy cry that sounded like Lexa's name, and started shaking wildly. Lexa let go of Clarke's back and grasped her horns, pulling her head down for another kiss. Their lips met, and Clarke let go, inner walls throbbing as she pushed out a flood of wetness.

Most of the mess spilled into Lexa's hand, but she didn't care. Feeling Clarke come for her was too sweet to describe, too precious to put into words. She kept curling her fingers, although she had trouble moving with Clarke's muscles squeezing them so tight. Meanwhile, Clarke sucked the tip of her tongue, shivering as she rode out her release.

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It lasted a long time, but Lexa wished it could have gone on even longer. She couldn't get enough of Clarke's cute little whines, the sway of her soft body, the smell of Clarke's need rising between them and the feel of skin clinging to skin. Clarke pulled back, looking at her with cloudy eyes. "Lexa..."

“I love you.” Maybe it was selfish, forcing those words on Clarke so soon, while she was still struggling with such serious problems, but Lexa couldn’t keep it in anymore. The words slipped out, and a look of surprise washed across Clarke’s face, followed by a flicker of pain. “I’m sorry,” Lexa said, withdrawing her fingers. “I shouldn’t—”

Clarke’s tail tightened around her wrist, preventing her from pulling out. “Lexa, it’s okay. I… I love you too. I just don’t… I’m not sure how this is going to work. And I want it to work. I want it to work so fucking bad.” Her blue eyes welled with tears, and Lexa’s started to sting too.

“I don’t know, Clarke, but I promise we’ll figure it out. Please, don’t let it ruin this. It’s such a perfect moment—I don’t want us to lose it.”

Clarke sniffed, then smiled. She stroked the top of Lexa’s head, caressing the back of her neck. “Okay.” Then, softer and with more certainty, “Okay. We’ll find a way to fix it later. Tonight doesn’t need fixing.” Her tail unwound from around Lexa’s forearm, and she lifted up, grunting quietly as the fingers inside her slipped out.

“Lie on your back, baby,” she whispered, running her forked tongue over her pointed teeth. “I’m hungry.”

Chapter 12

Lexa's heart pounded. Merely looking at Clarke's full lips and long forked tongue sent a stabbing ache straight through her core. She wanted to feel that mouth more than anything in the world, anywhere and everywhere on her body. Her breath shook for it, her skin burned for it, and her insides pulsed for it, quivering with want.

"Clarke..."

Clarke smiled, dipping down for a soft kiss. "I wanna taste you so bad," she murmured, flicking her tongue against the corner of Lexa's mouth.

A shudder raced along Lexa's spine. She grasped Clarke's waist, struggling to keep her reactions under control. "Yeah?"

Clarke kissed her again, deeper this time. "Yeah. Can I?"

Lexa swallowed a groan. There was only one answer she could give, and gazing into Clarke's beautiful blue eyes filled her with enough courage to do it. She leaned back onto the mattress, trying not to squirm as she waited to see what Clarke would do.

A heated look of passion spread across Clarke's face. She prowled over Lexa's body, stretching languorously on top of her. "It's been a couple decades," Clarke purred, brushing a strand of Lexa's hair away from her cheek, "but I think I remember how this part goes."

"Don't tease me," Lexa rasped, but her voice became a pleading whine as Clarke found a sensitive patch at the base of her neck. The gentle suction of her mouth and the sharp edges of her teeth were a perfect contrast, and the light fluttering of her tongue soon had Lexa clutching the sheets. She fisted the fabric in her hands, but even that wasn't enough. The urge to touch Clarke, to hold some part of her, was overwhelming.

When Lexa first slid her fingers through Clarke's hair, she took great care. She didn't want to pull, to force this moment. But as Clarke's mouth moved lower, painting lines along Lexa's collarbone, she forgot her restraint. She grasped Clarke's curled horns instead, which were surprisingly smooth and comfortable handholds, tugging Clarke's head, but not really guiding. She didn't know whether she wanted Clarke to stay in one sweet spot, or travel everywhere at once.

Luckily, Clarke seemed more decisive. She scattered kisses across Lexa's shoulders, nipping and sucking as she went. When her lips moved lower, Lexa trembled, squirming beneath Clarke's weight. The tips of her breasts already ached for the heat of Clarke's mouth, throbbing as they strained toward the empty air.

"Baby," she mumbled, giving Clarke's head a subtle downward push. "Please... suck me?"

Clarke's sharp-toothed smile was positively wicked. She trailed lower still, wrapping her lips around Lexa's left nipple without breaking eye contact.

A hoarse cry broke in Lexa's chest. She gasped, clutching tighter at Clarke's horns, fingers flexing uselessly. The warmth of Clarke's tongue felt even better than she had imagined. It swirled around her in smooth circles, first one way, then the opposite. Lexa's hips stirred as well, searching for purchase against Clarke's soft stomach.

When Clarke hummed around the sensitive peak, Lexa swore the vibrations travelled straight down to her clit. It gave a painful twitch, unbearably swollen and sticky in her underwear. Her hiss alerted Clarke, who released her cherry-red nipple and kissed across to the other one. "You like this?" she breathed, in a smug tone that showed she already knew the answer.

"Oh, yes..."

"Hmm. What about this?"

Lexa could only watch in amazement as Clarke's thin, flexible tongue slid out, wrapping all the way around her nipple. The visual was shocking on its own, but feeling Clarke's silky tongue squeeze the sensitive point drove Lexa crazy. She'd never felt anything like it, hadn't even imagined it in her wildest fantasies.

Clarke took her sharp moans as encouragement. She remained at Lexa's breasts for a long time, lavishing them with attention one after the other. Lexa felt a deep ache every time Clarke switched, but she was far too overwhelmed to beg or offer

direction. After what felt like an eternity, Clarke finally began traveling down her belly. Lexa's nipples throbbed with neglect, but she couldn't bring herself to pull Clarke back up. She knew where her lover was headed next, to a place where she was in desperate need of attention.

Clarke stared up at her, unblinking, as she took the button at the front of Lexa's pants between her teeth. The teasing tug she gave was a wordless request, and Lexa hurried to comply, lifting her hips so Clarke could pull down her pants. They ended up abandoned, hanging off one side of the bed.

"You're so wet," Clarke said in awe, stroking the tips of two fingers along the dark stain in the middle of Lexa's panties. She wasn't wrong. The fabric was soaked through, clinging so close to Lexa's sticky lips that it almost seemed like there was no barrier at all.

"For you," Lexa gasped, spreading her thighs wider. Any lingering doubts were gone, and she wanted nothing more than the touch of Clarke's fingers and tongue. To her joy, she was rewarded with both. Clarke peeled off her panties with tender care, ducking beneath Lexa's knees and placing a kiss at the top of her mound.

Lexa shivered, waiting impatiently. The warm wash of Clarke's breath was a terrible tease, torturous enough to make her eyes blur. She continued gazing down anyway, determined to commit this moment in memory. She watched, savoring every sight, sound, and smell as Clarke tasted her for the first time.

She was so sensitive that the first stroke almost brought her to the edge. Orgasms didn't always come easily for her, but the fact that it was Clarke between her legs seemed to heighten everything. The next swipe of Clarke's tongue was broader, firmer. Lexa's hips gave a jolt. She could already tell it wouldn't take much experimenting for Clarke to learn her body's secrets.

"Mmm." Clarke let out a dreamy sigh, scattering a few loving kisses along Lexa's slick thighs before returning to her task. She ran her tongue through Lexa's wetness slowly, up and down, up and down. "You taste... *warm*."

Lexa didn't respond. She couldn't. She could only dig her heels in behind Clarke's shoulders and hold on tight to Clarke's horns. Her inner walls fluttered for some kind of penetration, but Clarke seemed determined to light up every nerve except the sensitive ones inside her. She trembled as Clarke's thin tongue flicked and teased, scooping up her leaking arousal while refusing to center where she needed it.

Though her words failed her, a choked cry caught in Lexa's throat. She rocked her hips, trying her best to communicate what she wanted. Instead of slipping inside her, Clarke's tongue slid up to her clit. It wrapped around the swollen bud, squeezing the shaft through its thin hood.

Lexa screamed. Even though Clarke had pulled the same trick on her nipples, she hadn't been prepared. Clarke's tongue was doing things beyond her comprehension, and when warm lips sealed around her as well, sucking her slow and deep, Lexa went flying. She bucked and thrashed, pulling Clarke's horns harder and spilling rivers over her lips and down her chin.

Her release rolled on for a long time. Clarke kept sucking, and she kept coming, and as much as she wanted to continue gazing down at Clarke's lovely face, Lexa couldn't keep her eyes open. She closed them, her head swimming with stars. In all her life, she'd never felt anything this wonderful.

Eventually, her ripples slowed down to aftershocks. She groaned, twitching a few times, and cracked open her eyes to reacquaint herself with the world. Clarke was gazing up at her, black tongue circling her shiny lips. Although she didn't brag out loud, Lexa could feel smugness radiating off her. It shone through in her grin, and Lexa had to smile back.

"Holy crap," she panted, blinking to clear her vision. Clarke's face was still blurry, as though it had been sketched with smeared pastels. "That was incredible."

"Incredible," Clarke repeated. "I like that. But I think I can do better."

Lexa barely had time to catch her breath before Clarke was at it again, tongue thrusting right past her entrance. She stiffened at the intrusion, but it didn't hurt at all. Clarke's tongue was warm and smooth and dexterous, and it could reach sinfully deep inside her, much further than a human tongue was supposed to go.

"Fuck!" Lexa had thought she was all worn out, but with Clarke's tongue probing inside her, she already felt like she needed to come again. It explored every crevice, lighting her up from within.

Clarke moaned, widening her mouth so she could suck the sensitive flesh around Lexa's entrance while her tongue continued thrusting. Her upper lip nudged the tip of Lexa's clit, and Lexa felt her core clench. There were so many sensations, too many to sort through all at once, and if she wasn't careful, another wave of pleasure was going to crash over her and sweep her

away.

Before she fell apart, one more plea floated from her lips, the only clear thought in her spinning head. “Clarke... Clarke, I love you...”

Clarke redoubled her efforts, licking and sucking and swirling, and Lexa shouted to the ceiling, shaking from head to toe and holding onto Clarke’s horns for dear life. If she’d spilled rivers before, she emptied a flood onto Clarke’s face this time, pushing out more with each pulse. Clarke didn’t seem to mind. Her tongue remained buried as deep as possible, and she caught as much of the mess as she could in her mouth.

This time, Lexa’s orgasm didn’t last. It was too powerful to string on for long. She slammed back to earth all at once, flushed all over and dizzy with exhaustion. Her hands went limp, releasing Clarke’s head, but she couldn’t raise her arms. In fact, she couldn’t move a single part of her body. She could only remain flat on her back as Clarke’s tongue set to work cleaning her, lapping up every bit of slickness that remained. Lexa shuddered, flinching through a few aftershocks, then sighed, allowing Clarke to do whatever she wanted.

Finally, Clarke drew back, resting her cheek on the cushion of Lexa’s thigh. “Hey,” she whispered with a lopsided smile.

“Hey,” Lexa croaked. “How are you?”

Clarke laughed. “Just groovy. You?”

Lexa managed a weak laugh. As adorably strange as Clarke’s slang was, she simply didn’t have the strength. Instead, she reached down to pet Clarke’s hair. “Where’d you learn to do that with your tongue?”

“Dunno, honestly. I haven’t had sex with anyone since I became a demon.”

“Wait, so that was all—”

“Yup. Regular old experimenting.”

Lexa threw her forearm over her eyes. If that was experimenting, she wasn’t sure she’d survive sex with Clarke once she got some real practice in. She remained silent for a while, content to bask in the afterglow and feel Clarke’s breath tickle her leg. “I’m not done yet,” she promised. “I’ll pay you back. I just need to catch my breath.”

“Actually,” Clarke said, “I could go for a little nap before round two. That was, um, quite a meal.”

It took Lexa a moment to realize what Clarke meant, but when she did, she blushed. “You mean my aura?”

“Yup. Did you know neon red is a color auras can be? Because I didn’t. You weren’t even that bright when you were masturbating in the bathroom.”

When Lexa processed the meaning behind that statement, her embarrassment doubled. “Wait, you heard that?”

“More like felt it,” Clarke said. “Let’s see, how can I describe it? Um... kind of like someone shoving a delicious piece of cake in my face when I wasn’t expecting.”

As awkward as the realization was, Lexa had to chuckle at that. “I guess I don’t need to be embarrassed now, huh? Since we’ve...”

“No,” Clarke murmured. She placed another kiss on Lexa’s thigh, nuzzling gently. “You’ve got nothing to be embarrassed about or sorry for at all.”

Lexa opened her arms, and without a word, Clarke slid up to join her. They cuddled close, holding each other at the same time, settling into a comfortable pile of tangled, sweaty limbs. The sheets were slightly damp, but neither of them cared. “Smells like us,” Lexa sighed when Clarke pointed it out.

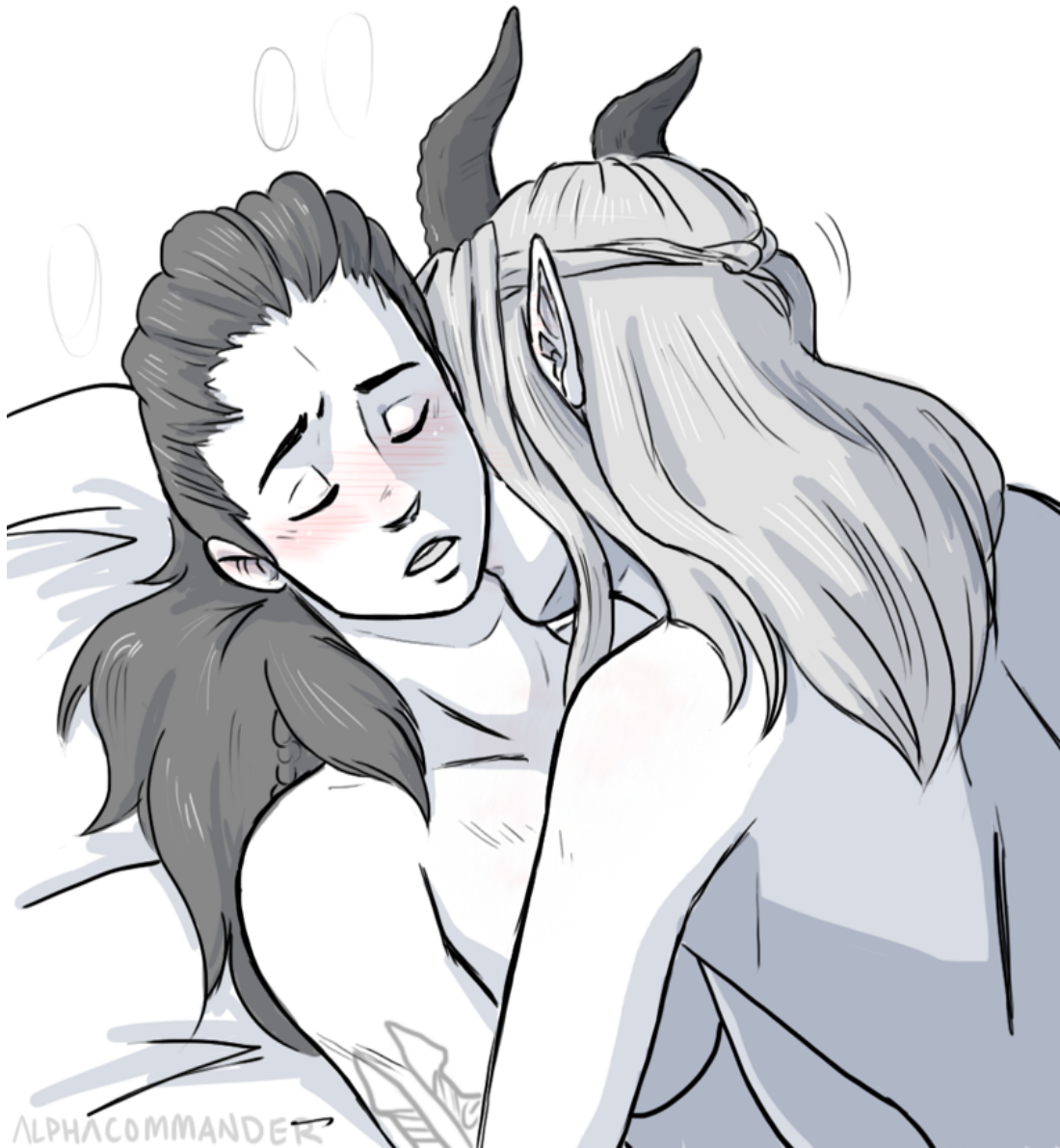
Clarke kissed her nose. “You’re adorable.” She hesitated, then said, “Can we just stay like this forever? Right here, in this shitty hotel room, in this bed.”

There was a hint of sadness in Clarke’s voice, and Lexa stroked Clarke’s cheek, desperate to soothe it. “No... but what I’ve got in mind for us in the future is even better. After we figure out how to free you.”

For a moment, hope flickered in Clarke's shining eyes. "You seriously think you can? For real?"

"I don't know, but I'll go to Hell to try." The joke had the intended effect. Clarke snickered, and then the two of them kissed, slow and satisfied.

They drifted off to sleep just like that, still snuggled on top of the sheets, clinging tight to each other as if they were afraid to let go.



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Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

Unfortunately @alphacommander couldn't do a drawing of this chap, but never fear!! She will be back next chapter as always. :D Nothing to worry about!

Lexa's ears woke her the next morning. She slipped from the embrace of sleep, picking up the buzz of a distant lawnmower, the hiss of the motel room radiator, and the quiet, adorable sound of Clarke's snoring. A smile spread across her face as soon as she remembered that what meant. She and Clarke were here, together, sharing a bed after spending the whole night making love.

That was what it had felt like: making love. Lexa had never been much of a romantic before. While she had harbored secret hope she might one day find a relationship that made her happy, she hadn't made looking for one a priority. When she did dream about such things, she kept those thoughts tucked away, telling herself they weren't important or practical.

Then, Clarke had happened.

From the first moment they'd met, Clarke had caught Lexa's attention. As the weeks passed, Clarke had brought down all her defenses almost effortlessly. And as the weeks had turned to months, Lexa had begun to forget how life without Clarke had felt. She didn't want to remember, either. Now that they were together, really together, she wasn't willing to give it up.

Lexa opened her eyes, and was welcomed by the sight of Clarke's hair shining in the early morning sun. They'd forgotten to close the blinds the night before, and the light turned her soft locks a glittering gold. Lexa pressed a kiss there, careful to avoid Clarke's horns so they wouldn't poke her face.

Clarke stirred in her arms. "Mm?" she moaned, yawning loudly.

"Good morning to you too," Lexa murmured. She brushed some of Clarke's hair aside and kissed the nape of her neck. Her warm sleep-smell was still there, and Lexa drew it greedily into her lungs. She'd enjoyed Clarke's smell in secret since they'd started sharing a bed, but this time, Clarke's scent carried a bit of her in it too.

She also realized that, to her immense delight, Clarke's naked body was fully available to her. Most mornings, she woke up to the torturous feelings of Clarke's plump rear nestled comfortably against her lap. At least, it seemed to be comfortable for Clarke. For Lexa, it was usually a distinctly uncomfortable sensation. But this time, there was no underwear in the way, and no shirt to cover Clarke's breasts either.

Lexa was all too eager to take advantage. She searched out the place where Clarke's neck joined her shoulder, sucking softly as she slid one of her hands up to knead Clarke's breast. Its peak was soft, but quickly stiffened as she rubbed her thumb around it. Clarke gasped, rocking backwards in approval, and Lexa released a muffled groan into Clarke's throat. She could already feel Clarke's wetness rubbing against her.

She plucked at Clarke's nipple, teasing the sensitive bud as she slid her other hand downward. The heat that greeted her fingertips when she dipped between Clarke's legs was overwhelming. She tried to stroke slowly, but her own need got the better of her. Soon she had Clarke's leg pulled backward over her hip, and she'd buried one, then two fingers deep within Clarke's warmth.

"Lexa," Clarke panted, shuddering with each slippery thrust. "Lexa, baby, keep going."

Lexa was all too willing to fulfill that request. She pumped a little harder, enjoying the sweet sounds Clarke made whenever she hit the right spot. She and Clarke had been gentle with each other the night before, soft and loving, as if going too fast or hard might break the moment. This time, Lexa allowed herself to be a little more passionate, increasing the speed of her hand until Clarke was bucking against her to keep up.

"Oh, oh, *ohhh* ..."

Clarke's wails got louder, and Lexa sucked harder at the patch of skin she'd captured. *I could do this forever*, she thought,

hooking her fingers firmly against Clarke's swollen, spongy front wall. *Hold her in my arms, make her come over and over again.*

Lexa's mind was far too cloudy for her to voice those thoughts eloquently, but she did her best. She muttered a low, broken "I love you," into Clarke's neck, grinding the heel of her hand against Clarke's stiff clit.

That brought the end crashing down. Clarke's muscles squeezed and rippled, and with each shuddering pulse, she sent streams of silky fluid splashing in Lexa's cupped palm. Lexa continued her curling thrusts. It might not be physically possible to make love to Clarke forever, but at the very least, she could draw every drop of pleasure from Clarke before she stopped.

Only when Clarke was a quivering mess and her hips had stopped churning did Lexa slow to a stop. She kept her fingers resting inside, savoring the way Clarke's muscles fluttered and twitched around them. It was so intimate, being wrapped snug within her lover's warmth this way, and she wasn't ready to leave yet.

"Lexa," Clarke said, sighing through a great big smile. "God, baby, the things you do to me."

"Mm." Lexa nuzzled Clarke's neck, taking a moment to inhale the sweet scent that lived in its hollow. "There are lots of things I'd love to do to you. And let you do to me."

Clarke chuckled. "I know. We made a pretty decent dent in the list last night, but we're nowhere near finished. First, though..." She brought her tail to Lexa's wrist, gently guiding her hand away. "Shower. Alone."

"Alone?" Lexa propped herself up on one elbow, unable to keep from pouting. "Why?"

"Because." Clarke sat up, arching her spine stretching her arms above her head. The motion had the unintentional effect of pushing her breasts closer to Lexa's face. "I need to take you to the libra—ohh..."

Lexa sucked Clarke's nipple deep into her mouth, swirling her tongue around and around the sensitive peak. She looked up at Clarke's face, waiting to be asked to stop, but Clarke simply smiled and caressed the back of her head, urging her to continue. "Oh, screw it. The library doesn't open 'til nine anyway."

With a soft growl, Lexa tipped Clarke back onto the bed, kissing across to her other breast and sliding a knee up between her thighs. Clarke was still slick and ready from her first orgasm, and Lexa grasped her hips, guiding her in a slow grind as she continued nipping and sucking at Clarke's breasts. She could lose herself for hours playing with them, and the noises Clarke made when she did were the sweetest sounds she'd ever heard.

"Your mouth," Clarke mumbled, threading her fingers through Lexa's hair and tugging to show her approval. "So warm... soft... more."

Lexa would have smiled if her lips weren't wrapped around Clarke's nipple. She lavished it with attention, circling one way, then the other, occasionally tugging with the blunt edges of her teeth. Clarke let out a pleased squeak whenever she did, and Lexa's head began to spin. She slipped one of her hands between Clarke's legs and slid her fingers back inside, stroking slow and deep.

Clarke gasped, clenching down with her muscles and angling her pelvis up for more. The tight squeeze of her inner walls only made Lexa want to push deeper, so she did, pushing to see how far she could reach. Clarke let out a deep, husky moan when she hit a certain spot, so Lexa repeated the motion, applying a little more pressure.

"You're... gonna make me come again..." Clarke gasped. "Not fair?"

Lexa released Clarke's breast with a soft pop. "Why not fair?"

With all the panting she was doing, it took Clarke a moment to answer. "Because you haven't come yet. Wait, pull out."

Reluctantly, Lexa obeyed—but her disappointment was short-lived. Her eyes widened as Clarke scooted out from beneath her, then slid back under in the opposite direction. Clarke ran her tongue over her lips, grinning up at Lexa from between her spread knees. "Sit on my face. This way, we both get a turn."

Lexa hesitated. This was something she'd never tried before in her limited sexual experience. She knew it was silly, but she couldn't shake the worry that she might squish Clarke under her or something. Her doubts were shaken, though, when Clarke ran both hands up along her thighs, urging her to lower her hips.

The moment Clarke's long tongue slid inside her, Lexa forgot what she was worried about. Making love to Clarke had left her

swollen and slick, and feeling Clarke's tongue wiggle inside her, trying to push even deeper, had her bucking her hips after only a few thrusts. She groaned, falling forward and bracing her weight on her hands.

"Mmf," Clarke moaned against her, rubbing her chin into Lexa's clit. She spread her legs, and Lexa got the message. Clarke was already wet and open, and Lexa's mouth watered for a taste of the sweetness she knew was waiting for her.

Clarke whimpered at the first touch of Lexa's tongue. She lifted her hips, rocking softly, and Lexa took that as a sign to get to work. Clarke's lips were already parted, and it was easy to reach all her sensitive spots. Each time Lexa found one, Clarke's hands tightened on her hips, pulling her down further and thrusting deeper.

Soon, Lexa wasn't quite sure what she was striving for anymore: Clarke's orgasm or hers. She did her best to focus, sucking Clarke's clit, swirling around her entrance, but it was incredibly difficult. Clarke's mouth was positively masterful, and Lexa began shuddering much sooner than she would have liked.

"Ease up," she gasped, lifting her mouth an inch away from Clarke's warmth. "I... I'm gonna come if you keep doing that."

Lexa could practically feel Clarke's smirk. The long tongue inside her plunged deeper, moving in ways that were absolutely unfair. Lexa yelped, clenching her muscles, but her efforts to hold back were doomed. Her core rippled to the rhythm of Clarke's strokes, and hot rivers ran out of her, covering Clarke's mouth and chin.

Clarke didn't seem to mind. She kept going, capturing Lexa's clit in her mouth and coaxing her through the contractions. Through the haze that had descended over her, Lexa realized that Clarke's hips were pumping too, rocking into the empty air. She buried her face back between Clarke's thighs, trying her best to lick and suck even while her body shook to its very core.

Luckily, it didn't take much technique or effort to bring Clarke over the edge with her. A couple strokes of her tongue did it. A high pitched whine vibrated from between her legs, and Lexa kept up the same pattern as Clarke came, pulsing hard into her mouth and shivering from the inside out.

Both of them kept going for as long as possible, but eventually, Lexa had nothing more to give. She rolled away from Clarke with a sigh, flipping onto her back and grinning at the ceiling. Clarke's slickness was all over the lower half of her face, and she felt more like a puddle than a person.

"See?" Clarke panted from beside her. "Told you it'd be good."

Lexa laughed. "Good feels like an understatement for what we just did." She started to flip over so she could lay by Clarke's side, but Clarke moved first, facing the right way round and snuggling up close.

"Know what?" Clarke asked, gazing at Lexa with playful blue eyes.

"What?" Lexa asked.

"I can't remember ever being so happy."

A warm glow filled Lexa's chest. "Really?"

"Really really."

"Well, do you know what?"

"What?"

Lexa reached up to caress Clarke's cheek despite the stickiness. "I've never been so happy either. I never thought I'd end up falling in love, but you're all I could ever wish for."

They both leaned forward at the same time, their mouths meeting in a soft kiss that tasted like the two of them mixed together.

Suddenly, the motel room flashed bright red. Lexa jerked upright, pulling the covers around her chest. She looked up at the ceiling lights, but they had gone out completely. Instead, the air itself was filled with an otherworldly crimson glow. A strange smell crept into Lexa's nose, and she recoiled. "Clarke?"

Clarke looked even more afraid than she felt. "No," she said, in a small, pleading voice Lexa had never heard her use before. "It's not time for them to come yet. They can't."

The red glow grew brighter, gathering in front of the television. It formed a pulsing vertical rectangle, almost like a doorway made of light. While Lexa stared in shock, it yawned open to reveal what looked like...an office?

It was an office. A surprisingly normal-looking one, too. The centerpiece was a large cherrywood desk, but there were also matching filing cabinets and a few potted plants. On the desk was a golden nameplate— *X. Zazabuul, Esq.*— and behind the nameplate, there was a man. Or, rather, a demon. He had curved ram's horns and a thick tail, and he was wearing a sharp business suit with a cheerful looking orange tie.

Lexa's heart lurched. She could only think of a single explanation, and it was an awful one.

The demon cleared his throat. "Clarke Griffin? I need you and your human to collect your clothes and step into my office."

Chapter 14

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Lexa barely remembered pulling on her clothes. She simply went through the motions, letting muscle memory take over as she stumbled into her pants. Meanwhile, her mind reeled. *A demon. There's a portal with a demon inside it right in the middle of our motel room. A lawyer demon, judging by the Esq. on his nameplate.*

She knew demon-like entities existed—Clarke being a case in point—but Clarke was also *Clarke*. This was someone... something... else, and Lexa struggled to wrap her mind around the implications. *How many of these demon lawyers are there? And what kind of law do they even practice?*

Beside her, Clarke glumly put on the clothes she had abandoned the night before. No longer did she seem scared, simply resigned. *Maybe numb would be a more accurate word*, Lexa thought as she watched. Clarke didn't smile, not even when Lexa glanced in her direction. She looked away, but not before Lexa saw that her eyes were filled with tears. Before yesterday, she had never seen Clarke cry before. It was even more heartbreaking to witness this time.

That helped Lexa manage her shock a little better. She smoothed out her shirt and squared her shoulders, holding her head high. She was still a year away from taking the bar exam, but that didn't matter. Clarke was too precious to let go without a fight—and if that fight was in the courtroom, then she had her education and experience to back her up.

Once she was dressed, she reached for Clarke's hand. Clarke hesitated, barely able to look at her, but Lexa took it anyway.

Clarke finally turned, offering the smallest of watery smiles, and the two of them headed into X. Zazabuul Esq.'s office together. The portal closed after they stepped through, sealing them in with a puff of theatrical smoke.

Decision made, Lexa turned her attention to the demon awaiting them. He was large and bulky, overly so, with muscles that bulged beneath his stiff collared shirt. His red skin and the angular ridges on his face served to make him look less human, and more intimidating, than Clarke, but the orange tie detracted somewhat from his fearful appearance.

Zazabuul nodded at the space in front of the desk, and two chairs appeared side by side. They looked uncomfortable, but Lexa supposed that was to be expected. They were in the plane of existence that humans thought of as Hell, after all. Comfy furniture for guests probably wasn't a priority.

"Sit down, Ms. Griffin," Zazabuul said. "And what is the name of your thrall?"

"Lexa Woods." Lexa extended her hand, the one that wasn't holding Clarke's, and to her surprise, Zazabuul stood up and shook. His huge clawed hand had a firm grip, and Lexa considered herself lucky to get away with slightly sore fingers and a tingling palm. Like Clarke, his temperature ran hotter than normal.

"She isn't my thrall," Clarke said, sounding defeated already.

Zazabuul's ridged forehead lowered. "You were bloodbound to her person until such time as you completed a great service for her, correct?"

"Yes," Clarke said.

"And this human, Ms. Woods, did in fact say that you had fulfilled her greatest wish, correct?"

"Correct."

"And so you completed the exchange as outlined in your original contract, with her soul as collateral?"

A little of the fire returned to Clarke's eyes. "No."

Zazabuul made a low rumble of disapproval. "No?"

"No," Clarke said again, with more confidence.

"And would there be any particular reason you neglected to complete your duties and obtain her soul, Ms. Griffin?"

"Because I didn't want to," Clarke said. "I love her."

Lexa's heart swelled with pride and affection. She gave Clarke's hand a reassuring squeeze.

Zazabuul frowned. "This is the second time you have violated your contract, Ms. Griffin. If you do not produce the required soul immediately, then I'm afraid the firm of Zazabuul, Astrael, & Xxrgglstz will be forced to pursue legal action against you."

Clarke remained stubbornly defiant. "Then do that. I'm not giving you Lexa's soul under any circumstances. She isn't mine, so she isn't yours to take."

Zazabuul ignored Clarke, turning to address Lexa. "Ms. Woods, is this true? If you provide Ms. Griffin with your soul, we will have no reason to bring charges."

A chill passed down Lexa's spine. She wouldn't let fear stop her, not for something as important as this, but she could feel icy tingles crawling beneath her skin. "I'm not here to give you my soul," she said in her most professional voice. "I'm here as Ms. Griffin's legal representation."

"Her legal representation?" Zazabuul looked doubtful. "I have no idea how familiar you are with Sheol's legal system, but I'm sure you're aware that having a human represent a demon defendant is highly irregular."

Lexa snorted. "I'm from the United States of America. Trust me, I'm used to working within the confines of a confusing and broken legal framework."

"That isn't the only problem," Zazabuul said, his frown hardening. "You aren't licensed to practice law in this dimension, or

even this planar system.”

Lexa’s mind raced, and she tried to keep a grip on her panic. “Could you please explain to me what happens if I do provide Ms. Griffin with my soul? What, precisely, would she receive out of the exchange?”

“Well, your soul,” Zazabuul said, as if it was obvious. “You would belong to her and come under her complete control. She would then transfer such assets to the firm, as stated in her contract.”

“I’m not taking your soul,” Clarke said immediately.

“Yes, she is,” Lexa said to Zazabuul. Then, softer, to Clarke: “Yes, you are.”

“Good,” Zazabuul rumbled, brushing a speck of what looked like ash from his neatly pressed suit. “I’m glad you have decided to be reasonable.”

“—but Ms. Griffin won’t be transferring my soul to you.”

Zazabuul’s glowing eyes widened. “What?”

“I assume that Sheol’s legal system allows defendants to represent themselves in court, even if they aren’t licensed?”

“It does,” Zazabuul said, “but that would be highly inadvisable.”

“And does it follow that a demon in full possession of a soul could then use that soul’s counsel *in propria persona* ? If I belong to Ms. Griffin, legally speaking, doesn’t that mean she would be representing herself?”

Zazabuul appeared extremely uncomfortable at that suggestion. “That would be a very irregular argument to make indeed.”

Lexa’s heart lifted a little. “Irregular isn’t the same as disallowed.”

Zazabuul remained in thought for a while, but eventually, he heaved his massive shoulders in a sigh. “I suppose, considering the circumstances, you could petition the judge for a special dispensation to counsel Ms. Griffin unofficially, if she chooses to represent herself. But I warn you, this will not end well for either of you. If Ms. Griffin is found in violation of her contract, her punishment will be severe. And if your soul is in her possession at such time, it and you will become the firm’s property once we seize Ms. Griffin’s assets.”

“Lexa...” Clarke wore her fear clearly on her face, but it came through in her voice as well when she said, “Please, don’t do this. If you lose your soul because of me, I’ll never forgive myself.”

“Clarke.” Lexa held Clarke’s hand tight, staring into her lover’s wet blue eyes, offering all the reassurance she could muster. “I can’t not do this.”

Zazabuul cleared his throat. “This seems like a conversation that ought to be held in private.” He snapped his fingers, and a neatly folded envelope appeared in his large hand, embossed with a red wax seal. “Your first hearing, Ms. Griffin. The judge will decide whether to permit you the use of a human soul to aid you in self-representation, and then legal proceedings can begin.”

Clarke took the envelope with her free hand. “Thank you, Mr. Zazabuul. We’ll be in touch.”

“In the meantime,” Lexa said, “how would I access information about possible legal precedent?”

Zazabuul gestured again, this time producing a small black business card from thin air. “Our official website and database,” he said, handing the card toward her between two large claws. “You may find this useful.”

“You have a website?” Lexa asked as she took the card.

“Doesn’t everyone? The address of our firm is included in case you may have any questions.” Zazabuul fixed his eyes on Clarke. “I will warn you, Ms. Griffin, that the repercussions will be very serious indeed if you do not produce the required soul, and no legal issues are found with your contract.”

Clarke nodded. “Yes. I understand.”

Lexa began to form a question, but the door behind them opened in a noisy rush of wind. Zazabuul and his office dissolved

into thick black smog, and she felt herself being sucked backwards toward the portal like dirt into the mouth of a vacuum. The chair beneath her vanished, and all she could do was clutch Clarke's hand and the card as she was yanked off her feet.

For a second there was nothingness, and then Lexa's rear hit the carpeted motel floor. Clarke was sprawled beside her, and Lexa's first instinct was to hug her tight. "Clarke, are you okay?"

"Fine." Clarke pulled her hand away, but not before giving Lexa's fingers one last squeeze. "He didn't have to throw us out of his office like that, though. Fucking asshole."

Lexa had to agree. Their meeting with Zazabuul had been the opposite of pleasant. In fact, if it hadn't been for all the questions and plans swirling around in her mind, Lexa was certain she would have been terrified. Perhaps she should be terrified, but the only thing she could think to be afraid of was losing Clarke. Not demons or portals or anything else.

Losing Clarke is the worst thing that could possibly happen. So I'm not going to let it.

She stood up, offering Clarke her arm, and the two of them made their way back to the bed. The sheets were still rumpled, but looking at them made Lexa's heart ache. It was a reminder of everything she'd found, but also how easily her new happiness might be snatched away.

"Lexa?"

Lexa turned to look at Clarke, who was sitting next to her on the edge of the bed. They were close enough for their thighs to touch, but Clarke tried to scoot closer still, holding tight to Lexa's arm.

"Why did you agree to put your soul on the line for me?"

"Because I love you," Lexa said, without a single beat of hesitation. The thought of losing her soul was frightening. Terrifying, really. But when she went back over her conversation with Zazabuul, she didn't feel a single ounce of regret.

"I know that." Clarke's voice was soft, uncertain. "But just because you love someone doesn't mean you're willing to give up your soul. That's—I don't think you understand. It's a really big deal, Lexa. We're talking eternity here. If we lose..."

"I won't lose," Lexa said. "Not when the stakes are this high."

"You're the one making them high," Clarke said. "I know you love me, and I love you. I do. But if you let me go, it won't be so bad. You can move on, find someone else—"

Lexa shook her head. Just the thought of letting Clarke go split her heart in two. "Never. I can't let you go without a fight, Clarke. Please, don't ask me to."

Clarke sniffed, pressing her lips together to stifle tears. "If you love me, you will, because I couldn't bear it if anything happened to you. I'll survive if I go to some other master, as long as I know you're safe."

"I might be safe, but I won't be happy." She cupped Clarke's cheek, brushing a tear away with her thumb. "There's more to life than just living it, Clarke. It has to mean something. And you're my something."

At those words, Clarke broke down. She fell into Lexa's arms, holding her tight and sobbing into her shoulder. Lexa didn't try to stifle her own tears. She wept into Clarke's hair, hugging her as close as possible. *We're going to beat this*, she told herself with each breath, inhaling Clarke's scent to try and bolster her strength. *We're going to fight, and we're going to win.*

But deep down, under the shield of her determination, Lexa was utterly terrified.



Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the long break. Holidays happened. Anyway, we hope you enjoy!

Lexa stared at her reflection in the mirror, trying to regain focus. Her eyelids drooped, and there were noticeable bags underneath — likely because she'd spent the bus ride home yesterday, the following evening, and most of the night studying the website Zazabuul had given her. It had been surprisingly, even overwhelmingly, informative.

On the positive side, Lexa had found Sheol's legal framework startlingly familiar. The fact that it was so similar to the United States' legal system was a horrifying revelation she was hard-pressed to dismiss as mere coincidence, and would need to process later. On the negative side, she had learned that demon contracts were almost impossible to break.

Using a golden case file number she'd found scrawled on the back of Zazabuul's card, Lexa had been able to make an account on the website (after carefully reading all disclaimers, and unchecking the appropriate boxes to make sure she didn't sign away anything important by mistake). After that, she had been able to download Clarke's contract. She'd read and re-read it so many times that words were emblazoned in her brain, and she saw them whenever she closed her eyes...

A knock on the bathroom door startled her, and the small surge of adrenaline was enough to dispel her exhaustion for a moment. "Almost done, Clarke," she called, checking herself in the mirror once more. After adjusting the crooked collar of her red blazer, she blinked as much sleepiness as she could from her eyes and opened the door.

The sight standing before her was nothing short of incredible. There was Clarke, in a knee-length blue dress that somehow managed to be form-fitting and classy at the same time. A pair of off-white kitten pumps complimented the outfit, along with a thin silver necklace that did nothing to hide the bright purple hickeys on Clarke's throat.

Lexa's heart hammered hard against her ribcage, and all the moisture left her mouth. She knew she probably looked like a cartoon wolf, tongue lolling all the way to the floor, but it took her several moments to school her reactions. "Um, you've got..."

Clarke smirked, although Lexa could still see worry in her eyes. "I came in here to get some concealer."

"Oh."

Lexa took a larger step than necessary away from the bathroom counter, allowing Clarke to take her place in front of the mirror. She averted her eyes as Clarke rummaged through the drawer, trying to get a handle on her emotions. There were too many to sort through, but worst of all was a burning ache that she eventually recognized as resentment.

We should be dressing up because we're going out on a date, a voice in her head growled. Not because we could be ripped apart in the next twenty four hours. I should have kissed her when she came in, and said she looked beautiful, and tried to make her guess where I was taking her... or guess where she was taking me.

It still wasn't too late for at least one of those things.







“You look beautiful, Clarke,” Lexa said, a little shyly. Perhaps it was silly, since she’d wagered her soul for this woman, but in spite of her strong feelings, a large part of her remained uncertain.

Clarke’s reflection in the mirror smiled broadly. “Charmer. I have to admit, I like the new millennium’s fashion. Shift dresses didn’t do these curves any favors.” She turned, taking two clicking steps across the tile to hold Lexa’s hands. “You look beautiful too, Lexa.”

“I look like Carmen Sandiego,” Lexa mumbled. Her dress suit, red from head to toe aside from the white blouse under her blazer, had been one of her very rare impulse purchases. She might not have bought it at all if Anya hadn’t pestered her into it. According to Anya, red was a ‘power color’. A bit too powerful, in Lexa’s opinion, but the wry, sarcastic streak she kept deeply hidden had deemed it appropriate, considering they were about to enter one of Hell’s courtrooms.

“Carmen who?” Clarke asked with a furrowed brow.

Lexa chuckled. “Oh, right. She was from the 80s. Uh... a sexy, super-smart Latina thief who managed to commit spectacular heists no one else could solve.”

“And she wore red?”

“And a fedora.”

Clarke cracked another grin. “Sounds like my kind of woman.” Her smile faded quickly, and she leaned forward, resting her forehead against Lexa’s. “You don’t have to do this, you know. I can go to court myself.”

Lexa’s instinct was to recoil, but instead, she held Clarke tighter, wrapping the demon in her arms. “If you do, they’ll find you in violation of your contract. I’m not going to let them take you away from me.”

“Stubborn idiot,” Clarke laughed, but Lexa didn’t miss the audible tightness in her throat. “If you lose, they take both of us.”

“Then I won’t lose. I’m good at what I do. And just because I have an anxiety disorder doesn’t mean I’m afraid.”

The tips of Clarke’s fingers skimmed Lexa’s cheek, urging her to look up and open her eyes. “You should be afraid, but I’ve never thought you were a coward, not for one second. You’re the bravest person I know. And if you believe you can win this, I believe it too.”

The two of them held each other for several moments, until Lexa forced herself to let go. She placed a kiss on Clarke’s forehead and murmured, “I’ll let you finish your make-up.”

“You should finish yours,” Clarke said. “No offense, but you look like a raccoon with those eyes.”

Lexa sighed. Clarke had a point. She turned to the mirror and pulled out her makeup bag, spreading it open so she and Clarke could work side by side.

A few minutes later, when Lexa was in the middle of applying her lip liner, the familiar smell of sulfur crept into the bathroom. It was followed by an eerie, invisible shudder that passed through the air, and then a roar of familiar white static. Light flashed from the living room, and Lexa wasn’t surprised to see another rectangular doorway-portal appear near the television.

Clarke exhaled deeply, then squared her shoulders. “I guess we’re being summoned, huh?”

Lexa rolled her lips together, glancing in the mirror one last time. It was more to distract herself than anything. The thought that this might be the last time she and Clarke shared this crappy little bathroom together brought tears to her eyes that threatened to ruin her mascara. She blinked rapidly, grabbing her phone from beside the sink.

With a few taps of her thumb, she sent two texts, both of which she’d spent several minutes too long composing the night before. The first was to Anya. *‘I don’t tell you often enough, but I love you. I couldn’t ask for a better best friend.’* The second was to her mother. *‘Love you, Mom. Things are going well. Made some new friends and met a girl. I’ll call you soon.’*

The message to her mother felt incomplete, inadequate, but she hadn’t been able to think of anything better. Their relationship was somewhat strained, and when it had come down to brass tacks, Lexa hadn’t known what to say. Hopefully, it wouldn’t be her last chance.

She put her phone in her blazer and turned to Clarke. “Ready?”

Clarke’s fingers wove through hers, squeezing tight. “Ready.”

Together, they exited the bathroom and approached the portal. On the way, they stopped by the coffee table, where Lexa’s packed briefcase lay waiting. She’d done her best to come up with a strategy for Clarke’s defense, but so far, she didn’t have much to work with. And yet, Clarke was looking at her with such hope. There was fear on the demon’s face as well, worry Lexa would have given anything to soothe away, but as long as Clarke held some scrap of belief in her, she would persevere. She’d give anything on Heaven and earth to win this case, even if it meant going straight to Hell.

She scooped her supplies under one arm without releasing Clarke’s hand, then turned toward the portal. It pulsed ominously, and the light within flickered. Lexa steeled herself. Glancing at Clarke one last time, she stepped through, allowing the portal to suck her in.

Wind roared in Lexa’s ears, and a blast of heat hit her straight in the face. She closed her eyes, but the lights beyond the portal flashed like strobes, stabbing straight through her eyelids. She felt as though she’d stepped into the belly of a furnace, and sweat instantly sprouted along her skin. She knew she should be terrified—and she was—but she also couldn’t help thinking, *I wish I’d picked cooler clothes.*

The sucking sensation beneath her navel began to fade, and Lexa no longer felt as though she were being hauled along by a rope around her middle. As she came to a stop, her awareness sharpened, and she felt the comforting pressure of Clarke’s hand clutching hers once more. To her relief, she hadn’t dropped her briefcase either, although a few errant strands of hair had fallen out of her braid. She opened her eyes, trying to blow them out of her face with a puff of breath so she wouldn’t have to surrender Clarke or her computer.

To Lexa’s surprise, the large room she found herself in didn’t look all that different from an American courtroom. The walls and ceiling were made of polished black glass, and green fire blazed in ominous looking iron braziers with far too many

decorative spikes, but there were no otherworldly horrors awaiting them. In fact, the room was empty of people or demons. There was plenty of furniture, though — uncomfortable looking courtroom benches, the usual railing, twin tables for the prosecution and the defense, a jury box, and a judge's podium.

"Well," Lexa said, adding a deliberate laugh to her voice for Clarke's benefit, "at least there aren't any instruments of torture?"

"I suppose," Clarke said, with a forced chuckle of her own. "It would give the janitors a hell of a job, though. Can you imagine the clean-up?"

Lexa wished she hadn't made the joke. "Where's everyone else?" she asked, looking around the room once more. "Shouldn't Zazabuul be here? And what about the judge and the bailiff?"

In a literal interpretation of the old adage, 'Speak of the devil, and he shall appear,' a sharp cracking noise split the air around them, causing Lexa and Clarke to flinch in unison. Another puff of sulfur wafted through the room, and Lexa was startled by the abrupt appearance of three demons.

The first was an elderly lady demon wearing judges robes, with purple skin and upright spiraling horns. She also wore rather unattractive glasses on a chain looped behind her neck, in a style that reminded Lexa of something Miss Marple would wear, or perhaps Angela Lansbury's portrayal of Jessica Fletcher.

Accompanying her was an incredibly bulky male demon bursting out of what appeared to be a cross between a security guard's uniform and a black suit of spiked armor. His eyes glowed a terrifying yellow, and his lower jaw protruded like a bulldog's, revealing a double set of wicked looking fangs.

The third arrival was, of course, Zazabuul. Although he too was rippling muscular, he looked rather puny in comparison with the stocky bailiff (at least, that was who Lexa assumed the second demon to be). Zazabuul's suit was as sharp as the first time Lexa had seen him—practically identical, in fact. The only difference was his tie, which was a cheerful yellow color that made Lexa feel even more unsettled than she already was.

"Ms. Griffin, Ms. Woods. Thank you for being punctual."

Zazabuul nodded politely, a gesture that Lexa automatically returned. She realized she was still holding Clarke's hand, and after debating the merits of continuing to do so, decided to let go after a brief squeeze of apology. "Zazabuul," she said, shifting her briefcase to brace it more securely against her hip, "Good to see you again."

It was, of course, not at all good to see Zazabuul again, but Lexa was replying from rote. She didn't want to damage her standing before the demon she assumed was their judge by being obstinate or impolite. She shook his hand, and when it was offered, the hand of the judge as well.

"Allow me to introduce the Dishonorable Judge Malvoth of the 666th Circuit Court," Zazabuul said.

"It is highly irregular for humans to attend court sessions in this extraplanar dimension," the judge said, in a rather shrill but authoritative tone, "let alone request to act as defense counsel for a demon. However, I have agreed to issue a ruling on the matter in private before the start of the trial. I assume that is Ms. Griffin?"

Judge Malvoth looked at Clarke, who seemed to realize formalities were expected of her as well. She shook the judge's hand, then Zazabuul's, although when she turned to the bailiff, all she received as an unfriendly growl. Lexa was relieved she hadn't attempted to shake, a decision made easier by the fact that the demon was carrying a massive claymore in his six-clawed fist.

"You should know, Miss Griffin, that this may not be to your benefit," Judge Malvoth said. "Ms. Woods isn't familiar with Sheol's legal system—"

"I don't care," Clarke said.

Lexa tried not to wince. Interrupting the judge was never a good strategy when you wanted a ruling to go your way.

Her worry thawed just a little, though, when Clarke added, "I trust her."

"Perhaps we should take this to chambers," Lexa suggested smoothly. "Do I have permission to accompany Clarke?"

"Granted." The judge snapped her clawed fingers, and once more, Lexa found herself being yanked forward by an invisible rope around her middle. She nearly dropped her briefcase, but managed to hang on until she came screeching to a stop in front of the judge's podium.

Once her motion sickness passed, she looked around. Clarke was on her left, and Zazabuul was on her right. Judge Malvoth was seated at the podium, and the bailiff stood at his post, looking as menacing as ever. Fresh sweat sprouted along Lexa's skin, but not because of him. A wall of crackling fire had risen behind her, dividing the courtroom in half and offering some privacy, although there was no one in the gallery to overhear.

"Ms. Griffin, what is your reasoning in asking Ms. Woods to represent you?" the judge asked, peering at Clarke with piercing eyes.

When Clarke glanced over at her, Lexa offered an encouraging nod. They had gone over this several times already, although it hadn't helped either of their nerves much. "I'm not asking her to officially represent me. Like you said, Your—uh—Your Dishonor, she's not licensed to practice law in this dimension. I just want permission to consult with her while defending myself, since I'm currently in possession of her soul."

"Self-representation is a dangerous option," Judge Malvoth said. "You aren't familiar with Sheol's legal system, either. Counsel may be provided for you."

"No," Clarke insisted, squaring her shoulders. "I want to represent myself, with Lexa helping me."

In spite of their situation, Lexa felt a faint fluttering in her heart.

Judge Malvoth turned her gaze to Zazabuul. "I assume you have a problem with this arrangement."

"Indeed," Zazabuul said. "This is merely an issue of semantics. Despite what Ms. Griffin claims, she won't really be representing herself. She's trying to manipulate the Court into allowing her completely unqualified...um, *associate*, to act as defense counsel."

Lexa gritted her teeth at the word *associate*, but didn't speak despite the burn in her belly.

"Ah, manipulation," Judge Malvoth said with a sly smile. "But isn't that what our legal system is based on?"

"Of course," Zazabuul said. "Manipulation and altered truths. However, it would not do for the Court to allow a human to make a mockery of our legal system. The rules are always subjective, but the result of ruling in Ms. Griffin's favor on this matter would set a worrying precedent. Do you really want everyone who passes through this courtroom bringing whoever they like past the bar to advise them?"

Judge Malvoth's eyes narrowed as she considered the matter. "What do you say, Ms. Woods?"

"All the rules in Sheol can be broken at your discretion. You decide when and how. Just because you allow me to help Clarke doesn't mean you have to allow everybody and their grandmother to act as legal counsel."

"See?" Zazabuul said. "She admits it. She wants to act as defense counsel—"

"That's already very clear, Zazabuul," Judge Malvoth said, sounding more than a little annoyed. "The Court rules that Ms. Griffin may consult with Ms. Woods while representing herself."

Lexa's chest swelled with triumph. She turned to give Clarke a one-armed hug, but before they could touch, the judge cleared her throat and continued.

"I will warn you, Ms. Woods, you and Ms. Griffin had better come up with a *very* compelling argument if you expect me to nullify Ms. Griffin's soul contract. Such things are not to be taken lightly, and the parameters of this particular contract are exceptionally clear."

Lexa managed to suppress her smile. "I understand, Your Dishonor. This won't be a waste of your time."

"I should hope so." Judge Malvoth turned her gaze to Zazabuul, and although his face remained carefully blank, Lexa could sense he was annoyed. "Zazabuul, do you have a preference as to whether this trial should proceed with or without a jury?"

"A jury hardly seems necessary," Zazabuul said. "Of course, Ms. Griffin has a right to request one, but our firm sees no need." He looked toward Lexa, as if expecting her to speak for Clarke, and his eyes flashed an eerie shade of yellow, offering challenge.

Lexa's gaze flicked over to Clarke, and at her lover's encouraging nod, she made the choice for both of them. "Ms. Griffin would like to exercise her right to a jury."

"Very well." Judge Malvoth banged her gavel, which Lexa realized with some startlement was actually someone's polished femur. "Court will adjourn until this afternoon, when the jury selection process will begin. You get two strikes without

explanation, Ms. Woods. Use them wisely.”

Lexa nodded, but her attention wandered back to Zazabuul. Rather than looking defeated, a smug smile played about his scaly lips. It almost seemed as if... *Damn. He wanted a jury the whole time. But why? It would be easier to convince one judge to see things his way than a whole group of people.* That meant Zazabuul had some kind of strategy planned, and Lexa couldn't for the life of her think of what it might be.

“Lexa?

The brush of fingers against her arm drew Lexa from her thoughts. She turned to see Clarke, who looked somewhat more positive than when they'd first entered the portal.

“This isn't going as bad as I thought it would,” Clarke whispered, leaning in and keeping her voice low. “Maybe we actually have a chance?”

“Of course we do,” Lexa murmured, “but I don't trust Zazabuul. He's up to something, and the judge agreed to let me advise you way too easily.”

“Of course Zazabuul's up to something,” Clarke said. “He's a demon lawyer. When *isn't* he up to something?”

Lexa had to concede the point. She touched Clarke's elbow, escorting her away from the judge's podium with gentle pressure. She deliberately tuned out the bailiff's rumbling growl, refusing to give into the temptation to look back over at Zazabuul. She had a feeling if she gave in, she would still see that serpentine smile of his.

“Don't worry,” Lexa said, giving Clarke's arm a light squeeze. “I'm going to get you off—”

“I hope so,” Clarke said wryly.

In spite of her embarrassment, Lexa was relieved. If Clarke was joking, that meant she hadn't lost hope. “You know what I meant,” she said with an indulgent sigh. “I'll find a way to get you out of your contract.” *I just don't know how yet.*

Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

At long last, here is another chapter! :D We hope you enjoy. This drawing is only Clarke's face, but... honestly? I think it's one of the most stunning and detailed ones @alphacommander has done yet?? It's probably one of my faves.

As always, our blogs are @raedmagdon and @alphacommander on tumblr. I'm also on twitter and facebook if you want to look me up there.

Lexa's stomach churned as she glanced at the café menu, and she had to suppress a shudder of revulsion. She'd been relieved when Judge Malvoth had said court would resume 'after lunch', but she hadn't really thought about what lunch in Hell might entail. Now, the unfortunate answer was right in front of her, complete with pictures.

Apparently, in this dimension, 'Ladyfingers' weren't just a type of pastry.

"You didn't actually eat this stuff before you came to live with me, did you?" Lexa asked, staring warily at Clarke from overtop the menu.

Clarke snorted, pulling a face. "Uh, no thanks. Why would I want to eat eyeballs sautéed in the blood of the damned when potato chips are a thing that exists?"

Lexa's mind flashed back to Clarke's trash-filled nest in her living room. As crazy as it'd made her at first—though she had never complained—she found that she missed it. Over the past few months, the mess had become strangely comforting, in a domestic sort of way. "Is that why you eat so much junk food?" she asked, trying to distract herself.

"Yeah. The choices here aren't ideal. Do you know how hard it is to get people food in Sheol?"

"I can imagine." Lexa risked another glance at the menu, but quickly set it down again, changing the subject. She'd never order anything if she didn't get over her queasiness. "So, I have a strategy for jury selection."

"Oh?" Clarke leaned forward, elbows resting on the table beside her glass of water. (The waiter had looked at her strangely for requesting that, a look similar to the one he'd given Lexa when she first entered the establishment.) "What's your plan?"

"Pick smart assholes."

Clarke lifted her eyebrows. "You're gonna have to explain that one in more detail, babe."

"I've been thinking about demons," Lexa said, folding her hands on top of the blood red tablecloth. "In most stories humans have about them, they appreciate cleverness. It's demon tradition to let wily humans off the hook for outsmarting them. We want jurors who will think it's interesting that we've found a loophole in your contract, demons who appreciate an entertaining excuse more than the end result."

"There are some demons like that," Clarke said, nodding in confirmation. "Collecting souls is a game to them... and a game's no fun if you always win. There's no satisfaction in succeeding if humans never, ever get out of their soul contracts." She sighed, offering a shrug. "Then there are your run-of-the-mill sadists. Demons who just like to cause pain and don't appreciate a good trick. And, of course, there are demons like Zazabuul."

Lexa's brow furrowed. "How well do you know him, Clarke?"

"Not that well," Clarke said. "He's the demon who offered me my contract in the first place, but it's not like we're Facebook buddies."

A small smile flitted across Lexa's face. Clarke had very much enjoyed her introduction to Facebook, and had already friended all of Lexa's classmates, including Anya. "Is Zazabuul the type of demon who appreciates a battle of wits, or does he just like causing pain?"

“Neither,” Clarke said. “The best word I can use to describe him is ‘killjoy’. He’s a businessman first and foremost. He’s got quotas to meet, so I’m just a number to him.”

Lexa’s heart sank. If it was all about the business for Zazabuul, that would make things far more difficult. “He’s a dead end, then. What about Judge Malvoth?”

Clarke shrugged. “I don’t know anything more than you, although I’m surprised she bought your argument. No offense.”

“None taken.” Lexa took a sip of her water, enjoying the stream of cold that slid down her throat and into her belly. Even inside the café, the atmosphere was uncomfortably muggy. She had expected Hell to have more of a dry heat, but the clinging humidity was somehow worse. She felt like she was drowning in her own sweat, but it didn’t do anything to relieve her discomfort.

“Maybe Judge Malvoth is one of those demons who likes a good battle of wits,” Clarke suggested.

Lexa set down her glass and sighed. “Maybe. If she does, she picked the right career for it.” Her thoughts wandered, and she struggled to focus them. The urgency of their situation wasn’t conducive to providing the clarity she needed. *I feel like the answer is in Clarke’s contract. It’s right there, but I can’t quite see it...*

“I’m going to look at your contract again,” Lexa said, reaching down to unlatch her briefcase.

“Wait.”

Something in Clarke’s tone caused Lexa to pause. She put her hand back in her lap and looked up, concerned by the wrinkle she saw on Clarke’s forehead.

“Sorry,” Clarke mumbled. “Didn’t mean to freak you out. It’s just, after I signed Zazabuul’s contract, do you know what my biggest regret was?”

Lexa shook her head, waiting for Clarke to elaborate.

“My dad. Zazabuul said it was ‘traditional’ for me to have one last meeting with a loved one, if I wanted. A family dinner, a trip somewhere or other. I wasn’t allowed to tell him why I was leaving, unless I wanted to try and sell him on a soul contract too, but I could see him one last time.”

“You said no, didn’t you?” Lexa whispered. She reached across the table, resting her hand over Clarke’s.

“Yeah. I said no. I thought it would be too painful.” She closed her eyes, obviously trying to regain some control over her emotions. When she opened them again, however, her expression was full of conviction. “But some things are worth the pain, you know? I spent the next several decades wishing I’d taken that last meeting, just to see him one more time and tell him I love him.”

“This isn’t our last meeting, Clarke,” Lexa insisted, squeezing Clarke’s hand tighter. “I’m going to find a way to win this for you.”

“I believe you, but just in case... I don’t want to waste the time we have left. Have lunch with me, okay? One more time. My case can wait for twenty minutes.”

It really couldn’t, but Lexa didn’t argue. She couldn’t deny Clarke anything, especially not her attention when it was so obviously wanted. She forced a smile. “Okay. If that’s what you want.”

“It’s what I want.” Clarke drew her hand back and picked up her menu. “Now, let’s see about finding something we can actually stomach. “I’m guessing deep fried intestines is out?”

This time, Lexa didn’t shudder in disgust. Instead, she pulled the top of Clarke’s menu down, leaning over the table. “I love you,” she said, staring straight into Clarke’s eyes. They glistened with unshed tears, tears that Lexa desperately wished she could take away.

Clarke lowered the menu further. “I love you, too.”

They only kissed for a few seconds, chastely, both aware that they weren’t alone in the café and unwilling to draw more attention to themselves, but when she pulled back, Lexa felt better than she had since entering this dimension. She sat back in

her chair, and Clarke did the same.

“Tell me more about your parents,” Lexa said after a while. “What were they like?”

“Different,” Clarke answered, in a tone that might have been annoyance once upon a time, but had softened into something nostalgic and fond over the decades. “Mom was protective. She was always putting restrictions on me that made me feel like such a baby, but then she expected me to act like a little adult. I didn’t realize why at the time...”

“But you know now?”

“She almost lost Dad in the war. She saw something of him in me, I guess, and knew I was bound to do something stupid sometime or other.” Clarke laughed, softly and sadly. “Don’t think she could have predicted selling my soul to a demon, though.”

“Every parent’s dream.” It was a terrible joke, and should have landed badly, but to Lexa’s relief, Clarke’s laugh changed, becoming a bit brighter.

“I always knew I’d let Mom down, but at least I did it to save Dad. To give them a few more years together. They were so in love, Lexa. I... I couldn’t separate them like that.” Clarke’s bottom lip trembled, and she lowered her eyes to the table, sniffing several times before regaining her composure. When she lifted her chin, however, her cheeks were dry. She had maintained her composure. “I was closer to Dad than I was to Mom. He would’ve done anything for me.”

Lexa tilted her head. “Even sell his soul?”

“Absolutely,” Clarke replied, without hesitation. “He would’ve made the exact same bargain I did if I’d been the sick one, without even stopping to think. He was... how do I describe him? He was the one who let me be a kid. He took me sledding every winter. Took me to the zoo in summer, and he was better than the keepers, because he knew everything about all the animals. He taught me to fish, to swim, to shoot a gun.” Her smile returned as she tucked some of her free-spilling blonde hair behind her ear. “I thought he knew everything back then. He was my hero.”

A lump rose in Lexa’s throat. Hearing Clarke speak so lovingly of her father stirred strange feelings in her chest. Not jealousy, not precisely... maybe longing was a better word. There had been a brief period of time when she had been exceptionally close to both her parents, but then her awkwardness and anxiety began to manifest, and it had made things more difficult. Though they’d tried their best, it had taken her parents a while to understand why she didn’t fit in with their friends’ children, why she lost herself in books, why she wouldn’t give Great Aunt Beatrice a hug and instead hide behind her mother’s leg.

They hadn’t really known her then, and they still struggled now, but Lexa couldn’t blame them. It had taken her years to understand herself — to realize she was a warrior fighting an internal battle that no one else could see. *No one except Clarke.* Clarke knew the strength it took her simply to survive, and Lexa suspected Clarke would have learned that truth even without her succubus powers.

“I see why you signed the contract to save him,” Lexa said at last, her voice rough with emotion. She doubted she would have done the same for either of her parents, or they for her.

“Let’s not talk about the contract,” Clarke said again.

“What do you want to talk about?”

Clarke thought for a moment, then her blue eyes lit up. “Know how I told you that before I was born, my dad was an engineer on a submarine? Well, one time, *Flasher* —that was his sub—ran a patrol near Cam Ranh Bay in Vietnam. They got a message from another sub that a tanker convoy was nearby, and headed in to help take it down. But there was this huge storm, so visibility on the surface was limited.”

She paused, smiling, as if drifting back in time. “Dad used to say it was raining like a pissing cow when he told me the story... Mom always scolded him. *‘Why not just say cats and dogs, Jake? Little ears are listening.’ ‘Because it was worse than that,’* he’d say. *‘Just let me tell the story.’* Anyway, in the middle of the worst rain they’d ever seen, the *Flasher* surfaced and realized a fucking destroyer was literally right in front of them.”

“I don’t know anything about ships,” Lexa said, “but I’m guessing from ‘destroyer’ that that’s bad.”

“Not just bad. Terrible. Subs are all about being stealthy, and they’d just blown their cover. They had to react fast—Dad was the Enge, and the way he tells it, he was doing everything at once. They blew their first spread of torpedoes to save their asses

—and hit, but before the destroyer sank, a *second* destroyer popped out of nowhere and started dropping depth charges.

“They laid low for awhile, then rose to check the periscope. The rain made it almost impossible to see, but somehow, they spotted the tanker they were supposed to take out... and a third destroyer. Everyone was squeezing past each other in this cramped, stinking space, trying to get the torpedoes loaded again. *‘No one talked,’* Dad told me. *‘The quiet was never so loud.’* They repositioned before they could get spotted, and launched a second round of torpedoes. They took out the destroyer and set the tanker on fire before they had to dive again.”

Lexa leaned forward, drawn into the story. Clarke was telling it well—her excitement and pride were obvious in her voice. “And?”

“And three more destroyers showed up. The *Flasher* stayed down for the entire day, but when they rose at sunset, the tanker was practically sunk. Its escorts had abandoned it because they couldn’t deal with the fire. The *Flasher* sunk it for good with one last shot.”

“Your Dad was brave,” Lexa said. It was the only response she could think of.

“Yeah.” Clarke lowered her eyes again, contemplating something in silence. “When he got sick, Mom and I took it worse than him. *‘We’ve all gotta die sometime, Clarke,’* he told me in the hospital. *‘It’s part of being mortal. I’m not ready to go, but I did good while I was here. Saved a few people, met your Mom... and had you. I’m prouder of you than anything else in my life. You’re going to be amazing.’*”

This time, the tears fell. Clarke fisted her napkin and brought it to her face, dabbing away a few tears. “Fuck, my mascara,” she mumbled.

“It doesn’t matter,” Lexa said, leaning forward in her chair to take Clarke’s other hand in both of hers.

“I guess it doesn’t.” She lowered the smudged red napkin and took a shuddering breath. “Not my make-up. My Dad. I sold my soul to save him, and he died anyway. I didn’t really save him. I just bought him a few more years.”



A few more years...

An idea seized Lexa's mind, and she dropped Clarke's hands, inhaling sharply. "Clarke, that's it."

Clarke swiped the back of her hand under her eyes, which only made the smudges worse. "What?"

"That's it. That's your defense!"

Lexa bent down to open her briefcase, pulling out Clarke's contract and setting it on the table. It only took her a few seconds to find the line she wanted:

'Wherein the undersigned, Clarke Griffin, shall receive the following in exchange for her mortal soul: a cure for the terminal illness of her loved one, Jacob Griffin.'

An excited grin spread across Lexa's face, and her hands trembled, shaking the edges of the paper. She had her case. Now, she just had to convince a jury to agree with her.

Chapter 17

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the long wait between updates. Good news: this story is done! Like, done-done. Bad news, no art for this chapter, @alphacommander has been busy drawing some of my original characters! So, not entirely bad news... ;D I hope you enjoy the chapter nonetheless. More will come in short order.

Selecting the jury was a rather arduous task, one made more wearisome thanks to the insufferable heat. Half an hour after returning to the courtroom, Lexa's suit was clinging to her in all kinds of uncomfortable ways. The heat didn't seem to bother Clarke, Judge Malvoth, or Zazabuul, so she tried not to let her discomfort show. She had to satisfy herself by gulping frequently from the bottle of water Clarke had procured for her at the cafe.

"What about that guy?" Clarke asked from her seat at the defense table, whispering the question while Lexa drained the last of her bottle. She hadn't seen a fountain to refill it at anywhere, but she was sweating like a hog, and the water was a necessity.

Lexa put down the bottle and licked her lips, studying the demon Clarke had pointed out: a slimy looking fellow with bulging gills on the side of his throat and visibly webbed appendages. "No," she muttered, shaking her head. "That guy just hates humans. He'll want to see you lose no matter what."

Clarke sighed. "Well, what about her?" She nodded at a demon two seats away, a female with feathered wings and a pinched, birdlike face that ended in a hooked black beak.

"Maybe. Her questionnaire didn't show any red flags."

Lexa's forehead furrowed as she considered the remaining candidates. Not including Gill Guy, she had one strike left, and using it at the right time was critical. There was a naked succubus with nipple piercings and seductively crossed legs, an imp with oversized bat ears sticking out from his head, and a lumpy mass of goo that bubbled ominously in the seat, bits of itself sloughing off to splat upon the floor.

But which ones should I fight to keep? Who should I strike?

"I wish I could kiss you."

The words took Lexa by surprise, but she saw nothing but honesty and wistfulness in Clarke's face. Suddenly, desperately, Lexa has the same wish. She longed to cup Clarke's face in her hand and pull her close, to bring their lips together in a gesture of love and reassurance. But she couldn't. This was a courtroom, and unprofessional displays of affection would only hurt Clarke's chances of getting off. She had to settle for squeezing Clarke's knee under the table.

Briefly, Lexa wondered if anyone had noticed her hidden gesture—then looked at the group of potential jurors with wide eyes. "Clarke, can demons other than succubi sense my emotions?"

Clarke shook her head no. "Only us, mostly. Good thinking."

Lexa smiled. Of course she hadn't had to explain her thought process to someone as clever as Clarke. A succubus would notice her nervousness, her inner conflict, her uncertainty, and her love for Clarke. She knew exactly who to use her second strike on. (Also, staring at a naked woman for the entire trial might make things awkward.)

"Uh-oh," Clarke murmured. "Looks like Zazabuul is ready."

Lexa glanced at the prosecutor's table. Zazabuul was indeed approaching them, briefcase in hand. "We've got this, Clarke," she said, with more confidence than she'd felt yet so far. At least she had a strategy now, a weapon with which to free Clarke from her contract.

Zazabuul offered them a perfunctory nod as he arrived before them and set his briefcase on the edge of the table. "Ms. Griffin. Ms. Woods." He looked to both of them before turning to the jurors waiting to be interviewed. "Are we ready to proceed?"

Clarke checked for confirmation, and Lexa gave a smile that she hoped was reassuring.

"Yes," Clarke said. "We are."

“Very well.” Zazabuul raised his hand to Judge Malvoth, who noted the gesture and banged her femur-gavel on top of her podium.

At the same time, the bailiff raised his voice in a terrifying growl. Even knowing that it was coming didn’t prevent a shiver from racing down Lexa’s sweaty spine.

“Disorder, Disorder. The 666th Circuit Court of Sheol is now in session, Dishonorable Judge Malvoth presiding.”

The room fell silent, then grew suddenly bright as plumes of fire shot up from strategically placed columns. Lexa gulped. As decorations went, she wasn’t a fan.

“We will proceed with *voir dire*. The purpose of jury selection is to ensure every type of prejudice is adequately represented on the jury. If you think that you cannot fulfill your duties, it is your obligation to tell me. Or don’t. I really couldn’t care less. We’ll start with you, Juror Number One — the un-gentleman with the serpent’s tail.”

Interviewing the candidates went more quickly than going over their answer forms, and Zazabuul’s efficient demeanor helped keep the process moving along. Juror’s One, Two, and Three were accepted, and Lexa used her first strike to remove Juror Four, the swamp creature whom she had dubbed ‘Gill Guy’ in her head.

“Is there any particular reason you don’t want this Juror to serve?” Judge Malvoth asked when Lexa announced her decision.

Lexa summoned her courage and said, “None of your business... I mean, um—none of your business, Your Dishonor.”

Her hunch was proven right when she saw a slight smirk cross Judge Malvoth’s face. “Very well. Juror Five?”

Jurors Five and Six were accepted, and when it came to Juror Seven, a skeletal demon with fire in its empty eye sockets, Zazabuul used one of his strikes. “I believe this defendant may have pro-human sympathies, considering he used to be one.”

Lexa swallowed down her gasp. *That thing was a human once? If I lose, what will I become? A succubus like Clarke? Will Clarke even stay in her current form?* She took a deep, calming breath, forcing herself to focus. *No. Neither of us are going to become anything, because I’m going to win this.*

Jurors Eight, Nine, and Ten passed—including the birdlike woman with the hooked beak—but when it came time for Juror Eleven, Zazabuul used his second strike. “I’d like to remove the blob, Your Honor. Conversing with it would require an interpreter.”

“That’s clear bias, Your Honor!” Lexa protested. “He can’t strike a juror for that reason.” The blob made more burping bubbles, seemingly in anger, or perhaps agreement with Lexa’s point.

“Maybe not in the United States,” Judge Malvoth said, “but here, the only requirement is that the jury display a wide variety of prejudices. It doesn’t matter whether either of you are also prejudiced during the selection process.”

Lexa sighed. To her displeasure, the blob was removed, and they continued on to Juror Twelve, the succubus she had been eyeing for a while. The demon gave her a juicy wink followed by an air-kiss, and Lexa heard Clarke give a quiet huff through her teeth. The noise was soft, but possessive—and oddly, Lexa enjoyed it.

“I’m using my second strike,” she said.

The succubus pouted, folding her arms across her ample breasts, but Lexa’s request was accommodated. She was dismissed, the Judge called the next juror to be interviewed, and when most of the eyes in the courtroom were on Zazabuul, Lexa felt a friendly pinch on her behind.

This time, she did gasp aloud. “*Clarke!*”

Lexa looked back over her shoulder only to see Clarke grinning at her. “Gotta stake my claim while I can.”

“Not in court,” she grumbled, but she knew Clarke probably saw right through her weak attempts at gruffness.

Clarke sat back in her chair, seemingly satisfied, and Lexa tried to ignore the extra flush creeping across her already-burning skin. She didn’t meet the other succubus’s eyes as she was dismissed from the courtroom, and instead focused her attention on the next juror: a strange upside-down creature with its teeth somewhere in the middle of its abdomen.

At last, the process was finished. Twelve Jurors were approved and shuffled into the box to receive instructions, while Lexa, Clarke, and Zazabuul were given a short break. Zazabuul immediately pulled out a fancy looking cell phone and began a whispered conversation, while Lexa rustled through her briefcase and withdrew the only piece of evidence she planned to use: a copy of Clarke’s contract.

“What do you think our chances are?” Clarke asked, a little warier than she’d been before. The playfulness was gone from her eyes, and though she held her head high, there was more than a little fear behind her blue eyes.

“Good,” Lexa said, but she didn’t believe it. Her stomach had turned into a nest of snakes and her heart was hammering like a hummingbird’s.

“You’re lying,” Clarke said. “I can taste it on you. You’re afraid... and guilty.”

“What? No—”

“You shouldn’t feel guilty,” Clarke said. “If either of us deserves to, it’s me. I’m the one who signed the stupid contract and dragged you into this with me.”

“I’m the one who fell in love with you.” Lexa took Clarke’s hands in hers, and she could feel that they were shaking. “This was my choice every step of the way, and I don’t regret it.”

Clarke still looked unhappy, but eventually, she seemed to resign herself to whatever unpleasant mixture of emotions she was feeling. “Guess I shouldn’t complain about having a girlfriend who’s willing to walk into Sheol and go up against demons for me.”

Hearing it spelled out in such blunt terms gave Lexa a surge of confidence. She hadn’t thought of it that way. *Maybe it’s not such a big deal that I’m scared*, she thought. *Any reasonable person would be... and it doesn’t mean my case won’t win. I can be afraid and still get Clarke off. Ugh. Bad phrasing. She’s rubbing off on me—oh, goddamnit.*

The sound of Judge Malvoth’s gavel echoing through the courtroom signaled the end of the break. Plumes of fire spurted from the floor to the ceiling again, and the courtroom went silent. As the flames faded, Lexa noticed that the courtroom had filled up with people—or, well, Sheol’s approximation of people. A surprising number of demons had taken seats in the gallery, peering past the bar with excited eyes.

“Guess live courtroom dramas draw a crowd here,” Lexa said.

“It’s probably because of you,” Clarke whispered. “Not many humans come down here without signing contracts first. You’re a bit of an anomaly.”

Lexa nodded. She did feel like most of the demons were staring at her in particular. She tried to shake off the creepy sensation of being examined like a rare animal in a zoo—or perhaps, considering what demons liked to eat, a steak dinner.

“The prosecution and the defense will now present their opening statements,” Judge Malvoth said. “Zazabuul? You may proceed.”

Zazabuul stood up from his chair and straightened his tie. “Thank you, Your Dishonor.” He circled the prosecutor’s table and strode out onto the floor, turning to address the jury. “Demons of the underworld, this is a very straightforward case — so straightforward that it should never have gone to trial.”

A few members of the jury murmured.

“The defendant, Clarke Griffin, signed a contract a half-century ago. This contract.” With a spark of flame, a shining golden scroll appeared in Zazabuul’s claws, presumably a copy of the contract Lexa had on her own table. He unfurled it, and though it was unreadable from such a distance, a few members of the jury craned their necks anyway.

“It states that she agreed to give up her human soul to the firm of Zazabuul, Astrael, & Xxrgglstz in exchange for the removal of her father’s terminal cancer. Said cancer was removed as agreed upon. In fact, Ms. Griffin’s father lived for another twenty five years before his death.”

Zazabuul snapped the contract shut, and it vanished with a subtle puff of smoke. Lexa pressed her lips together unhappily. His attempts at showmanship—unexpected, considering Clarke had described him as a numbers type of demon—were getting on her nerves, especially because the jury seemed to be listening attentively. Perhaps she had underestimated him.

“As you know, my firm specializes in collecting human souls, transforming said humans into demons, and then unleashing those demons upon the mortal world to seal more contracts.” He gestured toward the table, pointing one of his claws at Clarke. “That was what Ms. Griffin agreed to do. Her contract bound her to a bracelet that, upon coming into the possession of a new owner, compelled her to obey their every command. It also stipulates that, upon granting said owner a wish, she was to collect their soul and transfer the asset to the firm.”

He paused once more, then jabbed his finger. “Ms. Griffin did no such thing. She openly defied her contract not once, but twice. She granted her first owner true love without first obtaining her soul for the firm, and granted her second owner the same boon. That owner, Ms. Lexa Woods, is currently acting as Ms. Griffin’s defense counsel.”

Zazabuul turned his eyes on Lexa, and Lexa felt the eyes of the jury fall on her too. It was even worse than being examined by the demons in the gallery. Even Judge Malvoth was staring at her with new intensity.

“Ms. Griffin has no intention of obeying her contract and collecting souls for the firm,” Zazabuul continued. “Thus, we have no choice but to seek restitution. I am certain that you, members of the jury, will see this case for what it is: a clear-cut breach of contract. Your only reasonable option is to find the defendant guilty.”

The air was still as Zazabuul returned to his seat, and Lexa started sweating again when she realized it was her turn. Her legs didn’t want to move at first, and she clutched the edge of the desk with both hands, willing herself to get up.

“Lexa,” Clarke murmured right against her ear. “You can do this.”

Lexa took a deep, calming breath. After a moment, she managed to stand and walk out onto the floor. She turned toward the jury and cleared her throat, forcing herself to maintain eye contact. It was more than disconcerting to look at the twelve demons—with just one glimpse, she saw horns, wings, flippers, eye-stalks, and twin trails of smoke rising up from one reptilian juror’s pierced nostrils.

“Ms. Woods?”

Judge Malvoth’s voice snapped her out of her bewildered state.

“Excuse me, Your Dishonor. I’m ready.” She spared a single glance at Clarke, desperate for one last bit of reassurance, and then began her opening argument. “Demons of the jury, this case isn’t as clear-cut as Mr. Zazabuul has made it seem to all of you. My client, Ms. Griffin, isn’t denying the fact that she signed a contract. She isn’t denying that she traded her soul to Zazabuul in exchange for her father’s life. But the firm of Zazabuul, Astrael, & Xxrgglstz failed to keep up their end of the bargain.”

The reaction from the jury was immediate. They started talking loudly amongst each other despite the banging of Judge Malvoth’s femur-gavel, and so did the demons in the gallery. While everyone was digesting her statement, Lexa snuck a peek at Zazabuul. To Lexa’s immense satisfaction, he looked startled by her strategy.

“It’s true,” she said, and the courtroom quieted somewhat in order to listen. “Zazabuul promised to heal Ms. Griffin’s father of his, and I quote: ‘terminal illness’. Said illness is never specified. The word cancer never appears in the document, not even once.”

“This is preposterous,” Zazabuul said flatly, in his normal speaking tone rather than the showman’s voice he’d put on for his opening statement. Lexa could tell he was angry nonetheless. “Your Dishonor, I object to this line of reasoning.”

“This is merely an opening statement,” Judge Malvoth said. “You can object all you want, but Ms. Woods may put forth any line of reasoning she chooses.”

Lexa resisted the impulse to smirk. Her anxiety was lessening by the moment, and she felt a swell of confidence as she caught Clarke’s eye. Clarke was leaning forward over the table, beaming with pride. It was difficult to tear her gaze away, but Lexa managed to do so, refocusing on the jury.

“Since the ‘terminal illness’ Jacob Griffin was to be healed of was never specified, I posit this: mortality itself may be considered a terminal illness. Every mortal eventually grows old and dies eventually, and a loving daughter such as Ms. Griffin surely wouldn’t have wanted that for her father. She exchanged her soul for his immortality, not merely the removal of his lung cancer.”

“This is ridiculous,” Zazabuul said, smoke rising from his flared nostrils. “No one has ever questioned the stock forms before —”

“Stock forms,” Lexa said, not bothering to protest at Zazabuul’s interruption. “The firm didn’t even care enough to specify the terms of the soul contract.” She stared down the jury, placing her hands on her hips. “Is it any wonder Ms. Griffin wants to be released from her debt? She didn’t get what she paid for. I don’t know this dimension very well, but I’m sure even the lowest levels of Sheol have rules about poor customer service.”

The demons on the jury began muttering again, forcing Judge Malvoth to intervene. “Disorder! Ms. Woods, are you quite finished? You’re causing a commotion.” From something in the demon’s tone, Lexa suspected said commotion had garnered

her some approval in Judge Malvoth's eyes.

"In closing, I'd just like to say that Ms. Griffin's soul contract will be entered into evidence. You don't need to take my word for it — you'll be able to read it for yourselves. It's an oversimplified and shoddy piece of work. Whatever happened to the days when demons crafted complex, elegant contracts tailored to specific humans, just for the thrill of the chase? These robotic, fill-in-the-blank forms are neither useful nor effective, as Ms. Griffin found out to her immense disappointment. Thank you."

Lexa returned to her seat, but Clarke clutched at her arm before her bottom could even hit the chair. "Babe, you were great!" she said in an excited whisper. "I think we've got this."

"So do I," Lexa whispered back, daring to hope.

Judge Malvoth banged again, interrupting their breathless conversation. "Zazabuul, would the prosecution like to call its first witness?"

"We would, Your Honor." Zazabuul stood, taking a moment to straighten his tie. Though he had been upset before, he seemed to have recovered, because there was a dangerous glint in his eye as he extended one claw. "The prosecution calls Ms. Clarke Griffin to the stand as our first witness."

Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the delay! I'll be posting one chapter a day until the story is finished, and the art will hopefully come later. :D

“Shit,” Lexa hissed beside Clarke’s ear. “Did you know he was going to do that?”

“No,” Clarke whispered back, “but I wondered whether he might try and pull something like this.”

Lexa’s stomach sank. “This isn’t legal. He’s required to notify you in advance if he wants to call you as a witness.”

“Not in Sheol he isn’t. He can do whatever he wants.” Clarke took a deep breath and squared her shoulders, a gesture that made Lexa’s heart ache for her. “It’s okay. I can handle it, I promise.”

Clarke can do it, Lexa told herself, trying to regain control of her spiraling thoughts. She’s smart. She’s resourceful. She can handle herself on the stand.

But she shouldn’t have to, said another, more protective voice in Lexa’s head. *You’re supposed to be the one defending her—*

Come on, stupid. Do you really think Clarke’s the type to sit back and let other people fight her battles for her? She probably wants a chance to speak for herself.

Lexa’s internal argument ended when Clarke’s hand clasped hers beneath the table. She squeezed back, but could only sit there helplessly as Clarke let go, standing up and walking confidently over to the witness stand. Lexa struggled to get herself back on an even keel. If she didn’t calm down and pay attention, she wouldn’t be able to give Clarke the best possible cross-examination — and a good cross might be their only chance to win.

“Take a seat, Ms. Griffin,” Judge Malvoth said as Clarke arrived at the podium.

“Aren’t I supposed to be sworn in or something?” Clarke asked.

“On what?” said Zazabuul, who had joined her in front of the witness stand. “The various holy scriptures you humans use are not exactly common reading material in this dimension, Ms. Griffin.”

Clarke gave a dry laugh. “I’m guessing perjury isn’t a commonly prosecuted crime here, either.”

“That would be an accurate assumption,” Zazabuul confirmed.

“If I can lie on the stand, then what’s the point of dragging me up here?”

“Does my answer really matter to you one way or another, Ms. Griffin?” Instead of looking at Clarke, Zazabuul glanced back at Lexa, and she noted how his eyes fell on her. She knew exactly why he’d done this: not just to prove a point to the jury, but to rattle her and Clarke.

He wasn’t successful in that last goal. Clarke merely shrugged at his non-answer. “Whatever. If you want to be annoyingly cryptic, go ahead, I guess.” She climbed the steps to take her seat, and as she adjusted the microphone, she gave Lexa a wink.

Lexa’s lips twitched into a slight smile. In spite of everything, she couldn’t help being proud of Clarke’s courage. It fueled her own, and she leaned forward in her seat, prepared to leap to Clarke’s defense at the first opportunity.

Zazabuul cleared his throat. “Ms. Griffin, on the date of October 14th, 1968, was your father was diagnosed with cancer?”

“Yes,” Clarke said, clearly and confidently.

“And on October 21st, 1968, did I approach you with a soul contract?”

“Yes.”

Zazabuul stepped closer, and though Clarke was positioned higher than he was, his posture made him appear to loom over her. “And did you sign said contract with the expectation that I would remove your father’s cancer in exchange?”

Lexa held her breath, but Clarke wasn’t intimidated. “I signed the contract because you said you’d cure my father.”

“Of cancer,” Zazabuul said.

Clarke shrugged. “The contract said, ‘of Jacob Griffin’s terminal illness’.”

Twin plumes of smoke curled from Zazabuul’s nostrils. “Yes, Ms. Woods has already made the wording of the contract very clear to the jury. You have not answered my question. Did you or did you not sign the contract with the expectation that I would remove your father’s cancer?”

“The way I remember it, you said: ‘I can cure your father’s cancer in exchange for your soul.’ One of the first things I said besides, ‘Holy shit, what the fuck are you and why do you have horns?’ was: ‘You’re going to screw me over, aren’t you? You’ll fix his cancer and then he’ll get hit by a bus or something the next day.’ And you said—”

“Our firm doesn’t operate that way,” Zazabuul said. Lexa was certain she could hear a tinge of annoyance in his voice.

“Yeah. Exactly.”

If Zazabuul was annoyed or thrown off by Clarke’s demeanor, he didn’t show it. He folded his hands behind his back, continuing to stare her down. “Ms. Griffin, do all mortals die?”

A small worry line appeared on Clarke’s brow. “Almost all of them, yes.”

“And did you know that our firm offers immortality contracts to humans or their loved ones in exchange for their souls?”

Zazabuul snapped his fingers, producing another small shower of sparks which formed into a shining golden scroll. From a distance, it looked identical to the copy of Clarke’s contract that Lexa had seen him use during his opening statement.

“No,” Clarke said.

“If you wanted my firm to grant your father immortality in exchange for your soul, shouldn’t you have asked for one of those contracts?”

Clarke’s jaw tightened. “I just said I didn’t know you offered them.”

“Wouldn’t a reasonable person have asked for immortality specifically, instead of requesting the removal of a terminal illness?”

“My dad had cancer,” Clarke insisted, with more sharpness in her voice. “I’m sorry I wasn’t thinking like a lawyer. I was kind of preoccupied.”

That got a chuckle from a few members of the jury, much to Lexa’s relief. It seemed lawyers weren’t universally loved in Sheol, just like they weren’t on Earth.

“Ms. Griffin,” Zazabuul said in a condescending tone, “your efforts to release yourself from your contract on a technicality are tiring. You didn’t want your father to live forever — you simply wanted him to remain healthy for an average human lifespan. In fact, I suspect you find the idea of eternal life terrifying.”

Lexa’s eyes widened, but Clarke’s reaction, though subtle, was more telling. Her lips parted, and though Lexa was a fair distance away, she could practically hear Clarke’s surprised intake of breath. The statement had made her nervous.

“Well, I don’t really care what you ‘suspect’ about me.”

Zazabuul snapped his fingers, and a large, glowing circle of fire appeared in midair, swirling before the jury. After a few belches of flame and smoke, it calmed, smoothing over until it resembled polished glass. The flames glowed bright white, then dissolved, leaving a portal that looked, to Lexa, almost like a television screen.

The image within the magic screen made Lexa’s chest tighten. It was Clarke — a younger version of Clarke with a shorter,

poofier haircut, wearing a raggedy t-shirt with a peace sign on it. She was sitting in a chair, in a barren hospital room. Lexa couldn't smell anything, but it was easy to imagine the scent of sterility and general unhappiness. In the middle of the room was a bed, and lying in the bed was a middle aged, brown-haired man who looked a bit like Clarke.

"We've all gotta die sometime, Clarke. It's part of being mortal. I'm not ready to go, but I did good while I was here. Saved a few people, met your Mom... and had you." Jake Griffin — for it could be no one else — reached out, grasping weakly at Clarke's hand. *"I'm prouder of you than anything else in my life. You're going to be amazing."*

Zazabuul snapped his fingers, and the portal disappeared. "Do you have anything you'd like to add, Ms. Griffin?"

Clarke pressed her lips together and shook her head, refusing to answer.

"The prosecution has no more questions for this witness, Your Dishonor," Zazabuul said to Judge Malvoth, heading back to his table with a bit of a swagger in his step and a twitch in his tail.

Lexa straightened in her seat as Judge Malvoth's eyes fell on her. "Ms. Woods? You're up, unless Ms. Griffin would like to interview herself."

"That won't be necessary, Your Dishonor." Lexa stood, tugging at the bottom of her blazer to straighten it. She glanced at the jury, but their intrigued expressions — at least, she thought they were intrigued... it was difficult to tell, considering some of the more drastic differences in facial structure — left her awash with anxiety. Instead, she looked at Clarke.

Come on, Lexa. Do it for her.

"Ms. Griffin," she said, approaching the podium, "do you think it was careless of Mr. Zazabuul's firm not to inform you about their immortality contracts?"

"Objection," Zazabuul said, rising from his chair. "Leading the witness much too obviously."

"Sustained," Judge Malvoth said. "That was painfully obvious. Rephrase, Counselor."

"Fine. Ms Griffin, would you have preferred an immortality contract to a 'cure for terminal illness' contract, had known about their existence?"

"Well, yeah." Clarke rolled her eyes at Zazabuul, a gesture the jury could clearly see. "I sold my soul so my Dad wouldn't die, didn't I?"

Lexa waited a beat before asking, "So, what about your father's final words to you? He didn't seem interested in becoming immortal in that memory of yours, so why choose that for him?"

"He didn't know immortality was on the table, did he? I think he would've reconsidered the whole 'we've all gotta die sometime' bullshit if someone had told him he didn't have to." Clarke looked over at the jury. "None of you wanna die, do you? It's common sense."

The members of the jury murmured amongst themselves, and Judge Malvoth banged her femur-gavel. "Disorder, disorder!"

Lexa didn't pay attention to the noise. She smiled at Clarke instead, her chest swelling with pride. *That's my girl.* Once the room quieted down, she continued. "So you're saying this seems unfair to you, right? Stuck working for this guy—" she jabbed her thumb back at Zazabuul, "—even after your father died in 1993. That's almost double the extra years you bought your father, isn't it?"

"Felt like a lot longer," Clarke grumbled.

"I'll bet it did." Lexa turned to the jury, adopting an incensed expression. "Zazabuul was careless. Sloppy. He didn't give his client what she wanted — which, I'm assuming, is actually how soul-contracts in Sheol are supposed to work, under ideal circumstances. But this sets a dangerous precedent. What happens if his firm keeps distributing vaguely worded and shoddily constructed contracts to humans?"

The jury murmured excitedly, and Judge Malvoth banged her gavel again. "Save your big speech for closing, Counselor. Do you have anything else to ask this witness?"

Lexa looked at Clarke, who shook her head. "No, Your Dishonor. We're finished."

"Zazabuul. Do you want a re-cross?"

Zazabuul stood from his chair. “No, Your Dishonor. In fact, the prosecution rests. Ms. Griffin’s signed contract is really all the evidence we need.”

“Objection!” Lexa shouted. “I move to have that statement stricken from the record.”

“Sustained.”

Lexa exhaled in relief.

“Ms. Woods, do you and Ms. Griffin have anything further to introduce into evidence?”

“No, Your Dishonor. The prosecution already entered the relevant exhibits.”

“Very well,” Judge Malvoth said. “Ms. Griffin, please return to your seat.”

Clarke stepped down from the witness stand, and Lexa struggled with the impulse to touch her as she passed by. All she could do was watch Clarke walk back to the defense’s table alone. She sat down, and Lexa saw her mouth the words: “You did great!” and blow a kiss. Lexa’s face burned, especially when she noticed Zazabuul snort at the display.

Judge Malvoth sucked loudly around her fangs, as if she were bored with the proceedings. “Ms. Woods? You may begin.”

Lexa straightened her shoulders. “Your Dishonor, could the court please produce a larger version of Ms. Griffin’s contract for the defense to use, like the prosecution did?”

Judge Malvoth looked at Zazabuul, who snapped his fingers lazily. A glowing portal appeared in the air beside Lexa’s head, hovering there until Clarke’s contract appeared within. The portal acted as a magnifying glass, highlighting the relevant paragraphs.

“Members of the jury,” Lexa began, “there is no mention of ‘cancer’ in this contract at all. The word is never used, and neither is any kind of medical synonym. The phrase ‘terminal illness’ is the only relevant wording here, and due to the contract’s exceptionally vague nature, it could mean almost anything.”

Lexa stole a glance at Clarke, who gave her a thumbs up, and at Zazabuul, who glowered unhappily at her. Quickly, she turned away and re-focused on the contract. “Mortality *itself* is terminal, ladies, gentlemen, and otherwise identified extraplanar beings. Jacob Griffin died twenty five years after Ms. Griffin signed her contract. This is clearly a breach of its terms.”

“Objection,” Zazabuul said, gouging the prosecution’s bench with his claws.

“Overruled,” Judge Malvoth said.

“But I never stated on what grounds—”

“I overrule it anyway.” The judge’s tail twitched behind her, almost like a cat’s. “This is entertaining.”

Lexa tried to take that as a good sign. She cleared her throat and addressed Judge Malvoth directly. “Your Dishonor, I would like to call my first and only witness to the stand: Mr. X. Zazabuul, Esquire.”

If the situation hadn’t been so serious, Lexa might have laughed at the gasps that rose from both the jury and the gallery. It was reminiscent of a telenovela — or would have been, if the blazing plumes of fire hadn’t erupted again. (Lexa couldn’t help wondering if they somehow managed to time themselves for dramatic effect.)

“Very well,” Judge Malvoth shouted, raising her voice to be heard. “Mr. Zazabuul, please approach.”

Zazabuul looked surprised at being called, but he regained his composure. By the time he reached Lexa, his expression was placid once more. “I hope you know what you’re doing,” he muttered as he passed her.

Lexa smirked. “Don’t worry about me. I’ve got this covered.”

Zazabuul took his seat, and Lexa squared off with him. Up on the stand, he had the height advantage, but she tried not to let that intimidate her. “Mr. Zazabuul, I only have one question for you. Did you use the exact same form Ms. Griffin signed with other mortal clients in similar situations?”

“Yes, but—”

“That is all,” Lexa interrupted, before Zazabuul could get started. “I’m finished, Your Dishonor. You can dismiss him now.”

Although he had maintained his poise before, Zazabuul didn't manage to hide his startled reaction this time. "What? That's it?"

"That's it," Lexa said.

"That's really all you wanted to ask?"

"That's all I wanted to ask."

Zazabuul looked at Judge Malvoth, who simply shrugged. "If you want to talk more, you can do it during your closing statements. You're dismissed, Mr. Zazabuul."

Looking quite chagrined, Zazabuul left the witness stand and headed back to the prosecution's table. Lexa, meanwhile, addressed the jury: "You have just heard Mr. Zazabuul admit to using the same soul-contract form for multiple mortals. In his pursuit of efficiency, he's turned his back on everything soul-contracts are supposed to be."

"You're getting into speech territory again, Ms. Woods," Judge Malvoth warned. "Do you have any other evidence to introduce?"

Lexa shook her head. "No, Your Dishonor. The defense rests."

"Very well. Take your seat, Ms. Woods."

With measured steps, Lexa returned to the defense's table, and to Clarke. As soon as she sat down, she reached for Clarke's hand under the bench, and Clarke reached back, clasping her fingers tight.

"You were awesome," she whispered. "I knew you could do it. You were red the whole time!"

Lexa nearly choked. "*What?*"

"I mean you were confident and excited. Not sexually this time, but—"

"Mr. Zazabuul," Judge Malvoth said, in a loud and commanding voice that drew everyone's attention and forced Clarke to be quiet, "you may approach and make your closing argument."

Zazabuul cleared his throat, turning toward the jury and straightening his tie. "Demons of the jury: the defense would have you believe that this is a messy case of miscommunication and incompetence. That is the furthest thing from the truth. It's really quite simple. Ms. Griffin signed a contract stating that she would exchange her soul for the removal of her father's cancer. Said cancer was removed, but Ms. Griffin has violated her contract ever since. She has not granted any wishes, produced any signed sub-contracts from her fellow mortals, or collected a single soul for the firm."

He turned toward Clarke, pointing at her with a sharp black claw. "Now, she makes a mockery of our court system by bringing a human into our dimension to defend her rebellious behavior."

The jury began to chatter, and Lexa swallowed nervously — not only because they seemed to be agreeing with Zazabuul, but because one of the more amphibious-looking jury members had decided to start licking its eyeballs.

"Ms. Griffin's contract is quite clear, and so is the law. You must find her guilty on all charges, and require her to surrender all of her assets to the firm immediately for the purpose of restitution, including her soul, as well as the soul of one Ms. Woods." He cleared his throat, looking quite pleased with himself. "That is all."

"Then sit down, Mr. Zazabuul," Judge Malvoth said. "Ms. Woods? I assume you will be making the defense's closing argument on Ms. Griffin's behalf?"

For a moment, Lexa remained frozen. All eyes in the courtroom were on her, and her heart was hammering so fast she thought it might very well explode. Then, she felt Clarke squeeze her hand, and Clarke's proud voice echoed in her head: "*I knew you could do it. You were red the whole time!*"

"Yes, Your Dishonor." Lexa stood up, circling the bench and standing before the jury with her hands folded behind her back. "Dishonorable demons, you've seen the contract Mr. Zazabuul mentioned for yourselves. I'm sorry to say, it's basically a fill in the blank form: so simple a third grader could have written it. Is that really the best a large, prestigious firm like Zazabuul, Astrael, & Xxrgglstz can do?"

Several sets of demonic eyes narrowed, and there was a bit of growling from her audience, but Lexa persevered. At least she had their attention.

“What ever happened to granting a mortal’s wish only to rejoice when it turns around and bites them in the ass? What happened to demonic pride and tradition? Where is the beloved artistry? The very best soul-contracts can’t be argued against at all, because they gave the recipient exactly what they wanted, only in a tragic and unforeseen way. This contract isn’t a win, and it isn’t clever. It’s just sub-par. Worse still, it’s *boring*. ”

Lexa pointed accusingly at Zazabuul, just as he had done to Clarke, not caring if the gesture appeared overdramatic. “This trial isn’t about Ms. Griffin. She’s just one human, so what do all of you care if she gets out of her contract? This is about holding the firms who are supposed to represent your dimension to a higher standard. Forms like these should never have been in use! How can the firm of Zazabuul, Astrael, & Xxrgglstz possibly offer its clients the evil personalized touch and existential horror they deserve with such little effort?”

Finally, Lexa paused and took a breath. “I trust you’ll do the proper thing and hold them accountable. By declaring Ms. Griffin not guilty and releasing her from her contract, you have the opportunity to show Mr. Zazabuul, his colleagues, and all of the lawyers in Sheol that they need to work a lot harder to sustain the proud and malevolent artistic tradition they’re supposed to represent. Thank you.”

For once, the jury remained silent. Lexa couldn’t tell whether they were considering what she’d said carefully, or whether they thought her argument was a load of crock.

“Ms. Woods?”

Lexa turned toward Judge Malvoth, who had called her name and was peering at her intently. *How long was I standing there staring?* she wondered. “Right. I’m finished, Your Dishonor.”

After waiting a beat, she returned to her seat. All of her anxiety, which she’d managed quite admirably to hold at bay, suddenly washed over her like a tidal wave. Her knees buckled, and she only just managed to sink down into her chair in time with some subtle assistance from Clarke.

“It’s going to be fine,” Clarke said. “That one guy’s smiling, see?”

“Clarke,” Lexa said shakily, “his face is upside down.”

“Oh. Yeah, I guess it is.” She clasped Lexa’s bicep, giving it a reassuring squeeze that was just a little too tight. “It’s gonna work out, Lexa. I know you’ll win this for us.”

Lexa tried to force a smile, but she simply didn’t have enough energy left. With closing arguments done, she wanted to melt into a shaking puddle of goo. *But what if I don’t?*

Chapter 19

While the jury deliberated, Lexa went to go and panic in the bathroom, which was a surprisingly nice place, all things considered. There were several stalls of varying shapes and sizes to accommodate different demons, making it more accessible than some of the Earth bathrooms she'd seen. Her stall was out of toilet paper, so she had to ask Clarke for some from a neighboring one, the toilets flushed prematurely if she moved too quickly, and none of the automatic hand sensors worked on the first try, but Lexa supposed that was to be expected. This *was* still Hell, after all.

Thankfully, the bathroom was also empty aside from her and Clarke, so Lexa felt one notch less terrified as she collapsed onto a horrid-looking paisley couch in the corner and buried her face in her hands, quivering with anxiety. Her eyes remained dry, but she couldn't stop shaking, and her breathing grew faster and faster. The muscles in her throat constricted, and she grew dizzy from lack of air.

"Hey, Lexa?" Clarke's voice cut through the encroaching fog, as did the light pressure of her hand on Lexa's shoulder. "Just breathe, okay?"

Although Lexa normally didn't — couldn't — talk during times like this, she forced herself to cough out a reply. She wheezed and choked on her first attempt, incapable of forming words, but eventually she managed to say, "No. Not okay."

"It *is* okay," Clarke insisted, sitting on the couch beside her. "I promise, Lexa, we're going to be okay. You kicked ass out there! We're gonna win this—"

"But what if we don't?" Lexa asked, sobbing without tears. "W—what if we lose?"

Clarke scooted closer, wrapping an arm around her shoulder and kissing the top of her head. "Then we appeal the case. Or try and make a break for it. Or play along and pretend to do whatever Zazabuul's firm wants us to do until we come up with a plan. We'll figure it out."

Simply hearing Clarke say the words quelled some of Lexa's fears. Logically, she knew they were in deep shit. If there were ever a good... well, not *good*, but if there were ever a *reasonable* time for someone to have an anxiety attack, this was it. But something in Clarke's voice convinced her that, somehow, the two of them would make it through.

"We've got time on our side, right?" Lexa asked with a broken laugh.

"Right," Clarke said. "I bet the firm will give you temporary immortality if they expect you to work for them. Even if I have to go back in the bracelet and you get put somewhere else, we'll find each other again."

Lexa sniffed, removing her hands from her face and looking at her wrist. Her Nan's bracelet was still there. Despite everything that had happened, part of her couldn't believe that a flimsy piece of jewelry from her childhood had brought Clarke into her life, or brought her all the way to another dimension to argue for their souls, for that matter.

"This stupid thing," she snarled, lips twisting into a frown.

"It's not stupid. It brought us together, didn't it?"

"But it's not fair," Lexa said, loud enough for her voice to echo in the spacious bathroom. "No one should own you just because they have this." She unfastened the clasp, removing the bracelet from her wrist and reaching for Clarke's hand instead. "Here, you wear it."

"That's sweet, Lexa, but the rules don't work that way. Even if you aren't wearing the bracelet, you still own it... and me, technically speaking. I'm bloodbound to you, remember?" Clarke sighed, looking wistful. "Your Nan tried to set me free that way, too." She passed the bracelet back, but Lexa refused to take it.

"I don't care if it cancels the magic or not." Lexa draped the bracelet over Clarke's wrist and did up the clasp, forestalling her protests. "It's yours. *You're* yours, even if it's only for a couple of minutes." She paused, her brow furrowing. "Wait, aren't I actually yours now? I did give my soul to you so I could act as your defense counsel."

Clarke chuckled. "Honestly? I have no idea. But it doesn't matter."

Lexa leaned sideways, resting her cheek on Clarke's shoulder. "No, it doesn't."

The door creaked open, startling the two of them apart. Lexa was torn between pulling away from Clarke and grasping for her hand, but eventually decided on neither. She remained frozen as someone else entered the room, a green-skinned woman with

two identical heads sprouting from her shoulders.

Great, Lexa thought. *Two pairs of eyes to avoid instead of one.*

“We should get back to the courtroom,” Clarke said, brushing Lexa’s elbow. “I don’t think the verdict will take too long.”

“Yeah.” Lexa’s stomach churned as she wondered whether a short wait time would bode well for them, or prove unlucky. She forced her leaden limbs to move, rising from the couch and exiting the bathroom with reluctant, hollow-sounding footsteps.

As it turned out, Clarke was right. They didn’t have to wait long. Only a few minutes after they returned to their table, Judge Malvoth reappeared in a swirl of smoke, alongside the intimidating bailiff with rippling muscles. “Ms. Griffin, Ms. Woods, you’re here. Good. That means I won’t need to send Grog after you.”

“Grog?” Lexa asked. The bailiff growled in acknowledgment, and she smiled nervously. “... Ah, I see.”

“Does that mean the jury’s reached their verdict?” Clarke asked.

“Indeed,” said Judge Malvoth. She looked past both of them, addressing the empty air. “Mr. Zazabuul?”

With a shower of sparks and a puff of what smelled like rotten eggs, Zazabuul appeared a few feet to their left. “Present, Your Dishonor.”

“Excellent. Then let’s get right to it.”

Spouts of fire billowed up from the holes in the floor again, and the members of the jury popped back into their box, all in their original seats. Lexa clenched her hands into fists, her nails biting her palms. All of the options Clarke had laid out for her kept running through her head: *appeal the case, make a break for it, play along...* Right now, making a break for it seemed like the most appealing option, but it was also the least likely to pan out if things turned ugly.

“Dishonorable members of the jury,” Judge Malvoth asked, “have you reached a verdict?” Sometime during the course of Lexa’s increasingly terrified thoughts, the judge had returned to her podium, where she could gaze imperiously down upon the courtroom.

“We have, your honor,” said the foreperson, the amphibious looking fellow who had been licking his own eyeballs earlier. “In the case of Griffin v. Zazabuul, Astrael, & Xxrgglstz, we find the defendant...” He paused to expel a wet, hacking cough, and Lexa felt herself grow faint. Luckily, Clarke was there to slide a supportive hand underneath her elbow. “... innocent on all counts.”

The spectators in the crowd — *Oh crap, I forgot there was a crowd!* Lexa thought — erupted into a raucous shouting match.

Some of the demon spectators booed, others cheered, and Lexa heard one high-pitched voice say very distinctly, “Aw, man. I wanted to see ‘em get disemboweled.”

Lexa’s head spun. She hadn’t even known disembowelment was an option. *Wait, did they say innocent?* She regained her former alertness, hanging onto the jury’s every word while Clarke squeezed the life out of her hand, bouncing excitedly on the balls of both feet.

“We have come to the conclusion that Ms. Griffin’s contract was, to put it simply, too boringly shitty to enforce. Therefore, Ms. Griffin will be awarded the return of her mortal soul, and retain possession of all her previous and newly acquired property.”

“Newly-acquired property. That’s you, babe,” Clarke whispered too loudly beside Lexa’s ear. “We’re free, Lex! We won!”

“... We won?” Lexa parroted. Then, with rising confidence and full understanding, “We won!”

“Furthermore, as compensation for damages suffered, Ms. Griffin will not be stripped of her demonic form. She will retain the use of her powers, with the exception of immortality.”

The foreman continued speaking, but Lexa wasn’t paying attention. Forgetting her fear, she threw her arms around Clarke with a joyful cry, pulling her into a passionate kiss. Clarke’s lips smiled against hers, and Lexa’s racing heart sprouted wings.

We won! Clarke gets to stay!

The sound of someone clearing their throat finally registered above the white roar in Lexa’s ears. She broke the kiss early, though Clarke made a whimper of protest and tried to keep going for a couple of seconds. A flush spread from the points of

Lexa's cheeks as she realized that Zazabuul had approached them, looking slightly sour-faced, but also surprisingly impressed underneath it all.

"Ms. Woods. Ms. Griffin. I suppose congratulations are in order."

"Really?" Clarke asked, clearly skeptical. She arched an eyebrow, keeping her arm tucked securely around Lexa's waist. "I didn't think a demon would be a good sport about losing."

Zazabuul chuckled. "I don't suppose I could interest you in a new immortality contract, Ms. Griffin? Personalized, of course."

"No thanks," Clarke said, squeezing Lexa tighter. "I'm good."

"As I suspected. Ms. Woods..." Zazabuul turned to her, and Lexa's wide grin wavered a little. "I have a proposition for you."

Lexa tried to swallow a nervous cough. "Oh?"

"Obviously, some of my firm's standard contracts will need updating in light of the Judge's ruling. I don't suppose you'd be interested in coming on as a consultant for the process?"

In spite of everything, Lexa couldn't help being somewhat flattered. "It's a... er, generous invitation, but I need to focus on my schooling. Besides, this dimension isn't exactly a friendly place for humans to visit."

To her surprise, Zazabuul smiled. "Well, that's flattering. Thank you. We do try to make Sheol as inhospitable as possible." Lexa stuck out her hand, and she and Zazabuul shook firmly. "Do let me know if you change your mind," he said. "You have my card."

"I will," Lexa said, while adding *Definitely not* inside her own head.

Zazabuul snapped his fingers, and another portal appeared, much like the one that had brought them to Sheol in the first place. "Ladies," Zazabuul said, nodding his head in farewell. "I'm glad to hear you didn't enjoy your visit."

"See you never," Clarke chirped, removing her arm from Lexa's waist to squeeze her hand instead. "Come on. Let's get the *hell* out of here. Get it? Get it?"

Lexa rolled her eyes. "Yes, please."

They stepped through the portal at the same time, their fingers laced tightly together. Once more, Lexa felt a sharp tug above her navel. The scenery around her blurred, and she felt the sensation of falling sideways through a hot and windy tunnel. A moment later, she yelped in surprise as her rear hit the floor — *her* floor, in her own apartment. She was sitting in front of the television, staring at her own bewildered reflection in its blank screen.

"Lexa, we did it!" Clarke squealed, tackling her backwards onto the rug.

Lexa couldn't help it. She laughed, gazing up lovingly into Clarke's blue eyes. "You did it," she said, only for Clarke to shake her head and snort. "What, you were amazing on the stand!"

"Well, yeah, but *you* were the one who gave that fantastic closing argument!" Clarke bent down, raining kisses on Lexa's face, and with each ticklish peck, Lexa's giggles grew louder. She was utterly relieved, and for the first time in a long time, the tight balloon of anxiety she had grown accustomed to feeling in her chest was gone.

Clarke's next kiss caught her lips, and as their mouths met, a wave of warmth washed over Lexa's body. She moaned in spite of herself, wrapping her arms around Clarke's waist without really thinking about it. *Oh, are we... ? Ohh...* Her soft groan became a whimper instead as Clarke began unbuttoning her suit jacket, stripping it off only to toss it carelessly away.

Lexa didn't bother to check and see where it landed. She had much more important things on her mind: like getting Clarke out of the sexy blue dress she was wearing.

Chapter 20

Chapter Notes

One more chap to go! The Epilogue will be posted tomorrow, and while it won't contain Anya's ENTIRE reaction, it's guaranteed to cause a few laughs and tears (I hope).

Even though her heart threatened to pound right out of her chest, Lexa forced herself to strip off Clarke's dress with a proper amount of reverence. Her fingers shook as she reached around Clarke's torso to pull down the zipper, but she was far too happy to be embarrassed by her own fumbling. *Clarke gets to stay.* The weight of that truth settled over her like a warm, comforting blanket. *No one can take her away from me now.*

Clarke placed a kiss on the tip of Lexa's nose, then another on her cheek and a third on her chin, one for each button of Lexa's shirt that she unfastened. "So, Ms. Woods, I don't belong to you anymore." She raked her nails lightly from Lexa's sternum to her navel. "I'm my own woman now, which means I can do *anything* I want to you."

A shudder raced along Lexa's spine. She leaned up in the hopes of tasting Clarke's lips, but Clarke pulled back, straightening to let the top half of her dress fall down to her hips. Lexa was struck breathless. Clarke's breasts, clad only in the tightly fitted material of her bra, were practically begging to be cupped.

Once Lexa remembered how to think and speak, the sight gave her the courage to say, "You're definitely your own woman, Ms. Griffin, but you still belong to me." She made good on her desire, filling her hands with Clarke's breasts. To her delight, she could already feel the stiff points of Clarke's nipples poking through the thin lace. "By choice, but that's just semantics."

"Oh yeah?" Clarke arched, pressing herself more firmly into Lexa's palms before removing them. Lexa made a noise of dismay, but it turned into a gasp of delight when she realized Clarke had only done so in order to reach back and unhook her bra. It fell away, and Lexa licked her lips as the thick pink peaks of Clarke's nipples came into view. "Prove it."

Lexa was more than happy to oblige. With a soft growl, she reversed their positions, shucking her open shirt before rolling on top of Clarke. She made quick work of Clarke's half-discarded dress, then wiggled out of her own skirt, but got distracted while it was still around her knees. Clarke's breasts were too tempting to resist. She began scattering kisses over and around them, sighing at the taste of Clarke's skin.

"Mm. Feels good."

The low purr of Clarke's voice urged Lexa to pull a nipple past her lips. She lashed it with her tongue, enjoying the way Clarke tensed and quivered beneath her. As she experimented with different strokes, switching between swirls and flicks, she made note of Clarke's responses. Everything seemed to earn a positive reaction, especially when Clarke wrapped a leg around her waist and started grinding against her stomach.

Feeling the soaked material of Clarke's panties rubbing against her belly made Lexa's own core clench with want. *She* had made Clarke wet. *She* was the one Clarke was moaning for. The experience was still new enough to drive her wild, although she doubted she would ever grow fully accustomed to it. She hurried to pull down Clarke's underwear and cup a hand between her legs.

The soft, trimmed thatch of hair above Clarke's swollen lips tickled the inside of Lexa's wrist. It made her giggle, and she lost her latch on Clarke's nipple just long enough for Clarke to guide her mouth to the opposite side. "Don't stop," Clarke pleaded, tugging hopefully at Lexa's hair.

Lexa hardly needed encouragement. She sucked hungrily at Clarke's other nipple as she put her fingers to good use, stroking light trails with the very tips. Clarke was dripping for her, and when she tested the ring of Clarke's entrance, she found it soft and open. When Clarke whispered, "Inside," Lexa was helpless to resist. She pushed forward with one finger, then two, gasping with delight at how easily Clarke's body welcomed her.

For a moment, Lexa was lost in her own little world, a world where nothing mattered but Clarke's warm, clenching walls. They quivered with every movement her fingers made, and Lexa sought out the spongy spot on Clarke's front wall, curling against it in hopes of a reaction. She wasn't disappointed. Clarke made a choked-off noise that might have built into a moan if given the chance.

When Lexa repeated the motion a second time, Clarke couldn't swallow the sound any longer. She groaned loud and long, and Lexa grinned, tugging the tip of Clarke's breast between her teeth.

"You're a tease," Clarke huffed, jogging her hips to try and take control of Lexa's rhythm.

Lexa continued thrusting at her own pace, refusing to be rushed. "Mm." She released Clarke's nipple and blew a cool stream of air across it. "And your point is?"

"No point." Clarke tensed, squeezing tighter around Lexa's knuckles. "Just wondering what I did to deserve it."

Although Lexa knew Clarke was searching for sympathy, she couldn't deny that it was an effective ploy. The needy look in Clarke's blue eyes tugged at her heartstrings, and the wetness smearing into her palm told her that Clarke needed her just as badly as she needed Clarke. She licked her lips, looking down at her cupped hand.

Well, I did win the case. We deserve to enjoy ourselves.

Her mind made up, she kissed her way down Clarke's stomach, delivering a few nips along the way. Although she tried to pace herself, Clarke's scent drew her inexorably downward. By the time she ducked beneath Clarke's knees and removed her fingers, her mouth was watering. She swiped her tongue between Clarke's pouting lips, gathering up as much of Clarke's juices as she could.

The taste drew a moan from deep within Lexa's chest. Clarke was mostly salty, but she possessed a slight edge of sweetness too, and it made Lexa crave more. Ignoring the swollen bud of Clarke's clit, she swirled her tongue against Clarke's opening, lapping up the wetness there.

"Fuck," Clarke gasped, fisting Lexa's hair in both hands. She didn't pull hard, but the pressure was enough to let Lexa know that she was doing something right.

Lexa indulged her hunger with an enthusiasm fueled by sheer relief. Clarke was here to stay, and each time that thought looped through her head, joy swelled within her. *She's staying. Staying with me. Mine.*

Although she was unused to such possessive thoughts, Lexa welcomed them with a level of comfort that surprised her. For the first time since they'd met, it felt *right* to think of Clarke as hers. Now that they belonged to each other by choice, and not because of some stupid contract, she felt as though she could lay claim to Clarke in a way that hadn't been open to her before.

Lexa pulled back to catch her breath, raking her nails possessively along Clarke's soft and generous inner thighs. "Love you. Gonna make you come so hard, Clarke."

"Yesss... make me..." Clarke rocked toward her, and Lexa resumed, finally drawing Clarke's clit into her mouth. It throbbed and twitched against her tongue, but she took that as a sign to apply extra pressure. Something within her craved *more*, though, and so she brought her fingers back to Clarke's entrance, returning them to their warm and comfortable home.

Far too soon for Lexa's liking, Clarke's walls began to quiver. Her already-ragged breathing became heavier, and her pelvis jerked erratically, clearly outside of her control. Although part of Lexa longed to keep Clarke balanced on the edge for a little while, just to prove she could, a larger part of her wanted to satisfy Clarke's every desire. The prospect of making Clarke come, of watching her break down into a hundred pieces and then re-form as a glowing, golden version of herself, was too tempting for Lexa to resist. She sucked harder and pumped faster, applying pressure in the spots that made Clarke's cries sound the sweetest.

"Lex-ahh!"

A powerful shudder raced through Clarke's body, and Lexa trembled with her own sense of triumph as fresh heat splashed into her hand. She curled her fingers sharply, determined to draw out everything Clarke had to give. All the while, Clarke moaned and thrashed above her, gripping her head so tight that Lexa found it difficult to take in air. She didn't mind the discomfort. It was more than worth it when she saw the expression of pure bliss on her lover's face.

It took a while for Clarke's hips to stop jerking, but eventually, they slowed down. Lexa drew in a deep breath of satisfaction, running her tongue over her glazed lips. Clarke's pelvis still twitched every couple of seconds, but when Lexa tried to continue, her efforts earned uncertain noises. "Too sensitive," Clarke sighed, stroking loose strands of Lexa's hair away from her sweaty forehead. "Give me a moment."

Lexa smiled as the warm glow of pride washed over her. Judging by Clarke's heaving chest, damp skin, and trembling limbs, her orgasm had all but ruined her. "Anything you want," she whispered, placing a kiss on Clarke's belly.

Clarke giggled and cupped the back of Lexa's neck, urging her to climb back up for cuddles. "I have everything I want already... well, almost."

Lexa suddenly found herself flat on her back, with Clarke's face hovering a few inches above hers. She gasped as Clarke's dextrous tail wrapped around her knee, pulling it to one side in order to spread her legs. "I thought you were tired?"

"Too tired to show you how much I love you?" Clarke's hand skimmed down Lexa's stomach, drawing a teasing circle around her hipbone. "Never."

Clarke loves me.

Although it wasn't the first time Clarke had said those words, they meant more to Lexa than ever before. All the other times Clarke had said 'I love you', it had been a beautiful expression of feeling — but that feeling had borne with it a sense of tragedy, as well as inevitable loss. This time, 'I love you' was a promise. The words carried a new meaning, one that struck an even deeper chord within Lexa's breast: 'I'll stay with you'.

"Please," Lexa said, winding an arm around Clarke's waist. "Show me."

And Clarke did, by running her hands and mouth over every inch of Lexa's willing body.

Lexa tried her best to savor each and every detail, but in spite of her efforts, the experience became a heated blur. One moment, Clarke's hands were at her breasts, kneading them and tugging at her nipples. The next, they were at her hips, urging her to grind down. Lexa's eyes rolled back in her head as she rubbed against the firm surface of Clarke's thigh. If she wasn't careful, she would come early, and she wasn't ready for their lovemaking to end.

But it doesn't have to end. Not anymore. We can do this whenever we want from now on.

Lexa clung to that fact as Clarke's clever tongue swiped patterns along her stomach. When she came, her release wouldn't signify an ending, but rather a new beginning. Suddenly, she found herself eager for it. Although Clarke's knee had shifted away, Lexa rocked into the empty air, searching for a new point of contact.

"God you taste good," Clarke mumbled, nipping the inside of Lexa's thigh.

"You haven't... uhhh..." Lexa had been about to say that Clarke hadn't even tasted her yet, but the statement soon became irrelevant as Clarke's tongue burrowed between her sensitive lips, seemingly determined to devour her.

It wasn't rough, not exactly. Clarke's tongue possessed a certain amount of gentleness, but there was passion behind each movement, too — an intensity that sent spots floating before Lexa's eyes. She gripped Clarke's curved horns, matching her lover's energy with her own need. Clarke's mouth was magical, and Lexa was more than willing to surrender to its talents.

"Clarke!"

Lexa's orgasm crept up on her without warning. One moment, she was basking in Clarke's love and attention. The next, she was screaming, fisting several soft locks of Clarke's hair along with the demon's horns. Lexa didn't merely tip over the edge, she hurtled straight past it, arching in ecstasy as the powerful waves of her peak bore her ever higher. As she came, Clarke remained with her, sucking her clit at just the right moments and with the perfect amount of pressure. Just when it became too much to bear, Clarke moved to her entrance, thrusting in and out as Lexa began her descent back to earth.

The next thing Lexa knew, Clarke was cuddled up against her side, nuzzling into the crook of her neck. "When did you get here?" Lexa asked in disbelief. For the life of her, she couldn't remember Clarke having changed positions.

Clarke smirked. "Are you saying you blacked out for a couple of seconds?"

"Maybe?" It wouldn't have been that much of a surprise, if Lexa were being honest. Clarke was far and away the best lover she had ever been with. *And if we're this good together now, imagine us in another ten years? Or twenty?*

"I'll take that as a compliment to my skills," Clarke said, placing a kiss on Lexa's throat.

"You certainly have many ski—"

Her perfect television reference was ruined by a loud bang on the door. "Lexa!" a familiar voice called from the hallway. "Lexa, what the fuck was that text about?"

Oh, shit. Anya!

Lexa winced, squirming out from underneath the warm weight of Clarke's body. Clarke grabbed her arm, urging her to stay. "Maybe if we're really quiet, she'll think we aren't home and go away?"

Clarke's — and Lexa's — hopes were dashed by the sound of the key rattling in the lock. The door flew open, and Anya hurried into the apartment, eyes ablaze with determination and worry. She froze when she caught sight of Lexa and Clarke entwined together on the floor, and her jaw dropped. "God *damn* it, Lexa, don't send me texts like that if you're just fucking your girlfriend!"

Lexa's first instinct was to grab some kind of covering. Fortunately, Clarke's pile of junk was nearby, and she managed to pull a blanket over her naked body. Only then was she able to meet Anya's eyes and recall the text her friend was referring to. "What the fuck, Anya? All I said was you were a good best friend. Why did that make you come racing over here?"

Anya groaned, pinching her forehead between two fingers and using her palm to shield her eyes. "I thought you were suicidal again, you dumbass. It sounded like a goodbye text."

A twinge of guilt tugged at Lexa's gut. In retrospect, she could see why Anya had made that assumption. "Oh shit, I'm sorry. But still, you could've waited to see if I'd answer the door."

"Put something over your girlfriend, please," Anya said, still covering her face. "I don't know what nudist colony she came from, but I'd prefer not to see her tits."

Clarke heaved an aggrieved sigh and pulled at the corner of Lexa's sheet, wiggling underneath it as well. "Okay, Anya. You can look now."

Anya uncovered her eyes, exhaling with relief. "Good. And I didn't just barge in for no reason, Lexa. You stopped responding to my texts. Now I can see why." Her brow furrowed in confusion. "What's with the horns, Clarke? Did Lexa talk you into some kind of kinky roleplay?"

"Why would you automatically assume *I'm* the kinky one?" Lexa asked, mildly offended. Then she realized the substance of Anya's question — and what it actually meant. Clarke hadn't bothered to hide her demonic attributes. In fact, Lexa could feel Clarke's tail curled protectively around her waist.

Clarke gave her a sidelong glance. "Should we tell her?"

Lexa made an uncertain noise. Anya was a very logical person, definitely not the type to believe in demons or other magical creatures. *Then again, I have the proof right next to me. And maybe it would make me feel better if someone else knew...*

"Tell me what?" Anya asked, her voice full of suspicion.

Lexa sighed. "Well, it's kind of a long story..."

Chapter 21

Chapter Notes

Well, we're at the end of this fic. Thank you so much for coming along this journey with me! I have a feeling we haven't seen the last of this universe...

Flowers lined the walkway leading to Green Valley Assisted Living Center's front door. There were all sorts — violets, petunias, even a cluster of sunflowers growing around the large sign on the lawn. Lexa's heart raced a mile a minute, but she couldn't help smiling. The beautiful reminder of life seemed especially appropriate here, in a place where most of the residents had reached their twilight years.

Beside her, Clarke remained unusually silent. She kept removing her hand from Lexa's grip to wipe her sweaty palm on her jeans and adjust her snapback, which she couldn't decide whether to wear forwards or backwards. The stiff set of her shoulders radiated nervousness.

Lexa paused in the middle of the walkway, cupping Clarke's cheek with her free hand. "It's gonna be fine, babe. I promise. Everything went well with Anya, didn't it?"

Clarke sighed, but Lexa counted herself victorious when the sound was followed by a small smile. "Yeah, it did... although I'm still not sure she believes us."

"I think the fire-hands trick convinced her," Lexa said. "Although maybe you shouldn't show her your tail too often."

"Tell me about it," Clarke grumbled. "My butt still hurts from how hard she pulled it."

"She did say she was sorry," Lexa pointed out.

"Yeah, yeah. She can tell it to my ass." Clarke paused, swallowing down a visible lump in her throat. "You seem so confident about all this. Telling my Mom. What happened to anxious Lexa? I'm not sensing yellow today."

A pleased flush warmed Lexa's cheeks. "She knows she has someone to lean on," she murmured, tucking a stray lock of Clarke's hair behind her ear. "And so do you, Clarke. No matter what happens in there, I've got your back. Just like always."

"Just like always."

Clarke leaned in for a kiss, one that melted Lexa's heart all over again. It was a feeling she'd never tire of — and now that Clarke was free, she could experience it again and again, until and even after the two of them retired to a place somewhat like this.

She laughed against Clarke's lips, and the two of them broke apart.

"What?" Clarke asked, raising a curious eyebrow.

"Nothing. It's just... I was imagining the two of us as cranky old lesbians in a nursing home one day. Holding hands in our wheelchairs and complaining about the flavor of jello in the dining hall."

Clarke started giggling as well. "That's adorable, and I'm all for it, but I'll be a cranky old *bisexual*, thank you."

"Of course you will, sweetheart. We'll be a cranky old lesbian and a cranky old bisexual together. How's that?"

"Sounds perfect." After chewing at her lip for a moment, Clarke gazed over Lexa's shoulder, toward the entrance to the building. "Okay. I think I'm ready."

The two of them entered Green Valley Assisted Living Center hand in hand, a fact that didn't go unnoticed by the receptionist behind the front desk. Fortunately, she seemed to think it was adorable, if the dopey smile on her face and the tilt of her head was any indication.

"Aww. Are you two ladies here to see one of our residents? I don't think I've met either of you before."

Lexa looked over at Clarke, who suddenly seemed unable to answer. Her expression turned pleading, and so Lexa took the lead, although not without some concern. She had never seen Clarke this uncertain of anything before.

“Yes, we are. Abigail Griffin?”

The receptionist’s eyes widened. “Oh. She has several friends here, but she doesn’t usually receive visitors from outside. May I ask who you are?”

Clarke opened her mouth at last, and Lexa squeezed her hand, offering silent encouragement. “Um, Dr. Griffin and my mother were really... close, a long time ago. I didn’t know she was here until recently.”

“That’s so sweet. If you could just fill out the visitor log?”

The receptionist slid a clipboard across the table, and Clarke picked up the pen, signing her name with rather sloppy penmanship. Lexa tried not to smirk when she noticed that Clarke had scribbled the last name ‘Woods’ instead of Griffin. *Maybe someday...* She signed the next line, then passed the clipboard back. “Where should we go?”

“Straight down the hall. I believe Abby is in the recreation room right now. Oh, this will be a lovely surprise! She’s one of our more chipper residents, you know, even in her nineties. That woman is smart as a whip. It’s no surprise she was a doctor...”

“Thanks.” Lexa offered the receptionist a polite smile and led Clarke away, very aware of the fact that the fingers around hers had tightened.

Getting Clarke down the hall was a bit like pulling teeth, but eventually, Lexa coaxed her over to a pair of glass double doors. A sign reading ‘recreation room’ hung over them, and a pair of potted palms stood to either side. “This looks like a nice place,” Lexa said. “Cheerful. I bet your mom is happy here.”

Clarke’s expression turned glum. “She would’ve been happier if her daughter hadn’t gone missing for fifty whole years.”

“Yeah, she probably would’ve been.” Lexa brought Clarke’s hand to her lips, kissing the knuckles. “But think about how happy she’ll be to see you after all this time? The receptionist said she was chipper and smart. I bet she’ll recognize you.”

Clarke winced. “Is it stupid of me to be nervous? It might be easier if she *didn’t* recognize me...”

“Hey, breathe. I know an anxiety spiral when I see one.”

On her directions, Clarke exhaled a long, loud breath. “Okay. Sorry.”

“You have nothing to apologize for. It’s so brave of you to come here, and I’m sure your mom will be thrilled to see you no matter what.”

“Really?” Clarke asked, with quiet but sincere hope.

Lexa nodded. “Really.”

Clarke withdrew her hand and turned to face the room. “All right. I’m ready.”

Lexa got the doors, holding them open so Clarke could enter first. When she peeked inside over Clarke’s shoulder, she saw that her earlier guess was accurate. The recreation room looked lovely, and the fact that it didn’t smell like a hospital was a plus in her book. The dozen or so residents inside seemed cozy, reading large print books or playing board games at the tables. Even more flower pots sat in the large windows.

Whoever the gardner around here is, Lexa thought, they’re definitely going above and beyond their job description.

“Well?” she asked Clarke after a moment’s pause. “Do you see her?”

Clarke remained silent. Slowly, she lifted a hand and pointed. Next to one of the windows was a woman in a wheelchair. She had wispy white hair, thick glasses, and a spray bottle in one hand, which she was using to water some of the plants.

I guess that’s one mystery solved.

“Do you want to go talk to her?” Lexa whispered.

Clarke hedged, shifting from foot to foot. “Yes,” she said, although she didn’t sound certain.

Lexa brushed her fingertips against the small of Clarke’s back. “You can do this. I believe in you.”

At last, Clarke stepped forward. She crossed the room, approaching the woman with the spray bottle. “Mom?” she said, in a weak and watery voice.

Slowly, the woman turned away from the plants. She gasped, and the bottle fell from her hand. “Clarke? Oh my god. I’m dying, aren’t I?”

“No, Mom. Shit, fuck, no.” Clarke hurried to her mother’s side, looking both embarrassed and guilty.

Lexa followed behind, feeling a bit guilty herself. *Okay, so, not the best start. Maybe I should have prepped Clarke’s mom first...*

Thankfully, Clarke quickly got a handle on things. “I know you’re a doctor, okay? And if you’re anything like you were fifty years ago, you don’t believe in magic, or heaven, or any of that stuff. But it’s really me. I promise. I just, uh... went away for a while.”

“But you... you’ve been gone fifty years,” Abby mumbled, still looking utterly awestruck. She seemed unable to tear her eyes away from Clarke’s face, and several times, she attempted to raise a shaking hand before setting it back in the blanket on her lap, as if unsure what to do with it. “You don’t look a day over twenty five...”

Tears welled in the corners of Clarke’s eyes, rolling freely down her cheeks. She dropped to her knees and took her mother’s hand, bringing it to her face. “I know. I’m sorry. You wouldn’t believe what happened even if I told you, but I *promise*, it’s me. It’s really me.”

For a long time, neither Clarke nor Abby said anything. They simply stared at each other and cried, overcome with emotion. Lexa hung back, feeling both touched and out of place. She couldn’t even begin to imagine how Abby felt, seeing her daughter for the first time in half a century, completely unchanged — but from the look on Abby’s face, Lexa could tell that she was overjoyed.

At last, Abby spoke. “I don’t care if this is real or not,” she said, stroking Clarke’s hair. “I’m just so happy to see you, Clarke. My baby girl...”

Clarke broke down into another round of tears. “I’m so happy to see you too, Mom,” she sniffed, wiping her nose with her sleeve. She continued clasping Abby’s hand tight, as though she never wanted to let go. “I’m sorry I left, but I did it to save Dad. I wanted the two of you to have the life you deserved together—”

“What do you mean?”

“I’ll tell you, but you won’t believe my explanation.”

Abby’s eyes narrowed, and Lexa caught a glint of determination in them. “Try me.”

“I made a deal with, um, a magical being. If I served them for fifty years, Dad’s cancer would be cured.”

“Clarke Griffin, don’t you lie to me after all this time. What really happened?”

Clarke sighed, and then, to Lexa’s surprise, she laughed. “Well, the magical being may or may not have been a demon, and the contract may or may not have said I had to serve them for eternity. But you know me. Always weaseling out of work early.”

Abby paused for a long time. Her gaze became distant, then concerned, and then confused. “...I believe you. *Why* do I believe you? It’s impossible.”

“It’s possible,” Lexa said, sensing it was time to enter the conversation. “Hi, Ms. Griffin. I’m Lexa, your daughter’s, um... lawyer.”

“Girlfriend,” Clarke said at the same time.

Abby did a double take. “Your... lawyer-girlfriend?”

Lexa blushed, while Clarke’s face broke into a grin. “Yes, Mom. Lexa’s my girlfriend. And my lawyer, I guess, but that’s not as important.”

Abby leaned back in her chair, shaking her head. “Well then, I guess this impossible story is true. I know hallucinations can be intense, but this goes well beyond the scope of my imagination.” She looked from Clarke to Lexa, then back again. “I’m *still* going to ask the nurse whether she can see the two of you... although I suppose I could hallucinate her answer, too.”

Clarke laughed. “Of course, Mom. You haven’t changed a bit.”

“You’re going to talk to me about not changing?” Abby insisted again. “You haven’t aged at all! Are you—”

“I’m mortal now,” Clarke said. “Like Dad would want.”

Abby shook her head in disbelief. “You really are my Clarke, aren’t you?”

“Yeah, Mom. I really am.”

“So, Miss Lawyer-Girlfriend.” Abby’s eyes shifted back to Lexa, and her expression became more contemplative — and just a little suspicious beneath the wrinkles. “What, exactly, are your intentions toward my daughter?”

“Only to love her, ma’am,” Lexa said, hoping Clarke’s mother could sense her sincerity. “Which I do, with all my heart.”

She held her breath until Abby gave her a look of approval. “Good. That’s all a mother wants for her child... and it’s something I thought Clarke would never have...”

“Mom, don’t cry,” Clarke pleaded.

“Happy tears,” Abby said. “I promise, these are happy tears, my love.”

Lexa wiped her own eyes with the back of her hand, placing the other on Clarke’s shoulder. As she looked down at Clarke and Abby’s laced fingers, she caught sight of her grandmother’s bracelet on Clarke’s wrist, shining in the sunlight that streamed through the window.

Thanks, Nana. For everything. I’m happy too — happier than I ever could have imagined.

EXTRA - Valentines Day

Chapter Notes

A little extra tidbit in the Bloodbound universe for you all! I hope you enjoy.

"Enjoying your dinner?"

Lexa leaned back and rested a hand on her stomach. She smiled across the table at Clarke, who watched her with hooded blue eyes and a knowing smirk. "Definitely. Just waiting for my second wind."

She considered the remaining crab cake on her plate. Tempting, but she wasn't sure she had enough room. The crab dip they'd split as an appetizer had been too delicious to resist. She took a long drink of water, then sighed, settling back into her chair. "I'm glad we tried this place. Haven't had good seafood in a while."

"I know," Clarke said. "I'm sure, in your infinite wisdom, you brought gum for afterward."

Lexa raised a brow. "Hoping to make out in the car?"

Clarke batted her long lashes, the perfect picture of innocence. "Who, me?" She pointed at herself. "Make out in a car? Never. How childish."

"Well, you are over 80..."

Clarke stuck out her bottom lip. "Rude." But the twinkle in her eyes gave her away.

Lexa reached across the table to hold Clarke's hand. "Hey, I'm not complaining." She squeezed. "You're the sexiest octogenarian I know."

As she'd hoped, Clarke burst out laughing. One or two people at nearby tables turned, but for once, Lexa wasn't embarrassed by their stares. She smiled, focusing on Clarke. *Let them look. I don't care if they see us holding hands and realize we're on a date.*

This warm, dizzy feeling was new to Lexa and it took her a moment to place it as pride. She was proud to be Clarke's girlfriend. Proud that they were a couple. While she preferred keeping her personal business private, tonight felt like a night for letting loose. She'd hold Clarke's hand if she wanted to.

Clarke's thumb caressed the side of Lexa's hand. Lexa looked down at their twined fingers, then up into Clarke's eyes, which had narrowed with what she recognized as mischief. "Keep sweet talking me like that and we won't make it to the car."

Lexa's eyes widened. The hot blush on her face spread rapidly and she felt a tiny tug of anxiety in the pit of her stomach. "You mean..." She looked around the restaurant, which wasn't too crowded, scanning the place for a bathroom. *Wait, why am I even looking? It's not like I'd let her... like I would ever...*

Clarke leaned in, drawing Lexa's eyes to the daring scoop of her neckline. It showed much more cleavage than it covered. Even though Lexa knew she shouldn't stare—not in public—she couldn't tear her gaze away.

"Don't worry," Clarke said, her voice low and husky. "I won't corner you in a public bathroom."

Lexa exhaled in relief. "Okay. Besides, you know I'm a germaphobe—ohhh?" Her voice trailed off into a questioning moan as something snaked along her inner thigh, stroking her leg through her pants. She gaped at Clarke, too nervous to make another sound, desperately hoping no one had heard.

Clarke flashed her a wicked grin. "Why use the bathroom when we have a perfectly good table?"

Lexa's face blazed like a bonfire. At the same time, a cold shudder raced down her spine. She snapped her mouth shut. "What are you doing?" she hissed through clenched teeth. "Is that your tail?!"

Clarke didn't answer. Merely winked. Said tail trailed higher, rubbing against the seam of Lexa's slacks. She tensed, closing her legs beneath the table. Unfortunately, that meant trapping the spade-like tip of Clarke's tail between them. It remained

there, applying slow pressure.

Lexa squirmed. Heat flashed through her belly, followed by a surge of sticky warmth.

"We'll definitely get caught if you act like that," Clarke said, completely casual. "But if you relax and enjoy the ride, no one will even notice." She pulled Lexa's plate over to eat the remaining crab cake.

Lexa didn't protest. Her brain was short-circuiting. Heat blossomed through her belly as Clarke's tail continued rubbing through her pants. It wasn't fair! What was it about Clarke that turned her on so stupidly fast? And in public? *She isn't even a real succubus anymore... shouldn't have that kind of irresistible influence...*

But Lexa knew it was no use railing against her feelings or her fate. Clarke had always been irresistible to her, powers or no. That wasn't likely to change any time soon.

"You'll get us kicked out," Lexa whispered, shooting Clarke a worried look. A final, desperate plea for mercy.

Clarke took a long swig of her draft beer. Lexa felt like she was sweating more than the glass. "If that happens, it'll make a funny story, won't it?"

Lexa started to reply, but words failed her as Clarke's tail escaped from between her thighs and deftly pulled down her zipper. It was all she could do to stifle a gasp. Her head swam while her heart hammered away in her chest. She had no idea whether arousal or anxiety would win out, but 'funny' definitely wasn't how she would describe the situation.

Clarke seemed to recognize her fear. Instead of slipping her tail inside Lexa's open fly, she paused, curling it over the top of Lexa's thigh and squeezing. A gesture of reassurance. "If you don't want to do this, I'll stop. No worries, no guilt trip. But I know you can be quiet. And it'd really turn me on." She ran her tongue along her bottom lip to emphasize the point.

Lexa chewed her inner cheek. Fuck. Clarke was no lawyer, but she could be very convincing. And it wasn't like Lexa hadn't imagined it. She was a stereotype, really. The straight-laced, buttoned-up lawyer with a stick up her ass about everything... except the wild side Clarke somehow managed to bring out. When Clarke made bold suggestions like this, she almost never regretted it afterward.

She glanced surreptitiously around the restaurant. Clarke was right. No one was paying attention. The nearest couple was enjoying their meal while the next-closest was buried in their menus. There was also plenty of alcohol at both tables. An excellent distraction.

Lexa looked back at Clarke, who gazed at her with round, hopeful blue eyes. That expression, more than her earlier flirtatious one, tipped the scales from embarrassment and anxiety over to arousal. She swallowed, gathering her courage. "Okay, but please don't do anything overt—"

Clarke slid her tail straight into Lexa's underwear.

This time, Lexa did a better job of stifling her moan of surprise. She clutched the table, grateful for the paper covering that crinkled beneath her fingers. Between that and the shadows, hopefully no one would see.

Clarke wasted no time finding Lexa's clit, using the flat of her tail to start a circular massage. Lexa tensed and held her breath, but withstanding Clarke was impossible. A moment later, she relaxed and spread her legs wider. She wanted more despite the potential risk.

"You're wet," Clarke murmured, leaning halfway across the table and staring directly into Lexa's eyes. "I knew you'd like this if you gave it a chance." It was a look that burned even more than the blush on Lexa's face and the fire in her belly.

Lexa tried and failed to avert her eyes. She couldn't break Clarke's smoldering stare. She *was* wet. Embarrassingly so. It was all she could do not to gasp Clarke's name as that wicked tail slid down toward her entrance, gathering her slickness to spread over and around her clit.

Fuck. It's almost like her tongue, but more dexterous. It wasn't the first time Clarke had manifested the tail for "personal" use, but it was definitely the first time in a situation like this.

Lexa suddenly realized she was rocking her hips. She froze, grasping the paper cover until it began to tear. That was different, too. Across the table from Clarke, she couldn't react or respond like normal. She had to stay still and endure, a kind of self-imposed bondage.

But what a wonderful kind of torture...

Another strong shudder raced through Lexa's body, but Clarke's strokes remained slow and unhurried. She was wearing that damn smirk again, one that played about her full lips.

Lexa's heart pounded in her chest, her throat, echoing in her ears. Her inner walls clenched around nothing as the tip of Clarke's tail traced over her opening without any follow-through. She suddenly felt painfully, keenly empty inside.

"Okay?" Clarke asked—checking in, but with audible smugness.

Lexa whimpered as softly as she could. She *wasn't* okay, but not for the reasons Clarke was probably worried about. She didn't need penetration for every orgasm, but for some reason, she craved the feeling of Clarke's tail moving and curling inside her.

"Please," she mouthed, not daring to put breath behind the words. She spread her legs just a bit wider.

Clarke tilted her head. "Please, what?"

With a huff, Lexa uncurled her fingers from the table's edge. Not trusting her voice, she made a brief "come hither" motion with her middle and ring fingers.

"*Oh.*" Clarke leered but didn't go in straight away. She circled Lexa's clit, painfully stiff and swollen, a few more times, then made similar circles around her entrance, merely teasing.

"Please," Lexa said, in a tight whisper this time. The most she could offer.

Clarke reached across the table to take her hand again, lacing their fingers. "If it gets too intense, just squeeze." Then she eased the tip of her tail inside, sinking in effortlessly and pressing against Lexa's front wall.

There wasn't much stretch, but the sensation of movement was glorious. It was all Lexa could do not to throw her head back and moan. She pretended she was a statue even as her body shook from the inside out, clutching Clarke's hand to maintain some tether to reality.

Her vision blurred. Her inner walls fluttered. Clarke's tail never stopped, coiling and slithering and exploiting well-learned places. It could go deeper than Clarke's fingers, and it did, but always returned to the swollen spot that made stars flash before Lexa's eyes.

She was close. So close. Her muscles tightened, stomach flexing. She didn't know whether to try and stave it off or embrace it. She desperately needed to come, but what if she couldn't conceal it? What if someone noticed—

That was a mistake to imagine. Her entire body burned at the thought. She couldn't tell the difference between embarrassment and desire anymore. She squeezed Clarke's hand and bore down, rippling with powerful waves. The white-hot core within her burst, radiating through her body. She trembled, scraping her chair against the floor as she shivered and spilled around Clarke's tail.

Oh, Clarke!

Clarke lifted Lexa's hand and kissed her knuckles. She didn't say a word, but she didn't need to. Her blue eyes were glazed over with lust, but there was plenty of love and warmth behind them, too. Enough love to see Lexa safely through her peak and guide her home again.

Lexa exhaled deeply, slumping forward and bracing her forearm against the table. Her hand went limp in Clarke's. She'd managed to keep quiet aside from some heavy breathing, but the release of all that tension made her feel like she'd just finished a hundred yard dash.

She opened her mouth, but nothing came out. She just stared, slack-jawed and dazed, at Clarke—who looked very much like the cat who'd gotten the canary.

"Everything okay, folks?"

Lexa blinked. The presence of someone beside the table sent a spike of adrenaline piercing through her post-orgasmic fog. She sat bolt upright and whipped her head around to see their server, a young woman with corn-silk hair in a braid.

Lexa swallowed, heart still racing, Clarke's tail still buried inside her. The realization caused her to pulse with unexpected aftershocks.

Much to her relief, Clarke took charge. "Yeah, everything's great. Thanks."

“Thanks,” Lexa repeated, like a confused parrot.

“Great,” the server said. “Can I interest either of you in some dessert tonight?”

Clarke shook her head, still holding Lexa’s hand. “No thank you. We’ll take the check, please.”

“Right. I’ll get that for you now.” The server nodded, smiled, then walked away, apparently none the wiser.

Lexa exhaled a breath she hadn’t realized she’d been holding. “You’re *cruel*,” she whispered.

Clarke withdrew her tail. To Lexa’s surprise, she did a quick scan of the room, then lifted it above the table on her side and slipped the spade into her mouth. She sucked, making a show of it, moaning low enough so only Lexa could hear.

Lexa nearly fell out of her chair.

As quickly as it had appeared, Clarke’s tail vanished. She leered at Lexa with far less subtlety. “I lied to the server. I’m *very* interested in dessert.”

Lexa fumbled to zip her fly. Her underwear was soaked, but she’d just have to suffer until they got home. In the meantime, she hoped their server would return soon. As usual, Clarke had turned something potentially horrifying into something exquisitely erotic, but she wanted out of here for multiple reasons.

“I can arrange that,” she said, flashing Clarke what had to be one of her dopiest smiles. *Screw it. I’m done with being embarrassed tonight.*

Clarke downed the dregs of her beer, then slid the strap of her purse over her shoulder. “You first,” she purred, stroking the muscles of Lexa’s forearm with feather-light fingertips. “I’m absolutely starving.”

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